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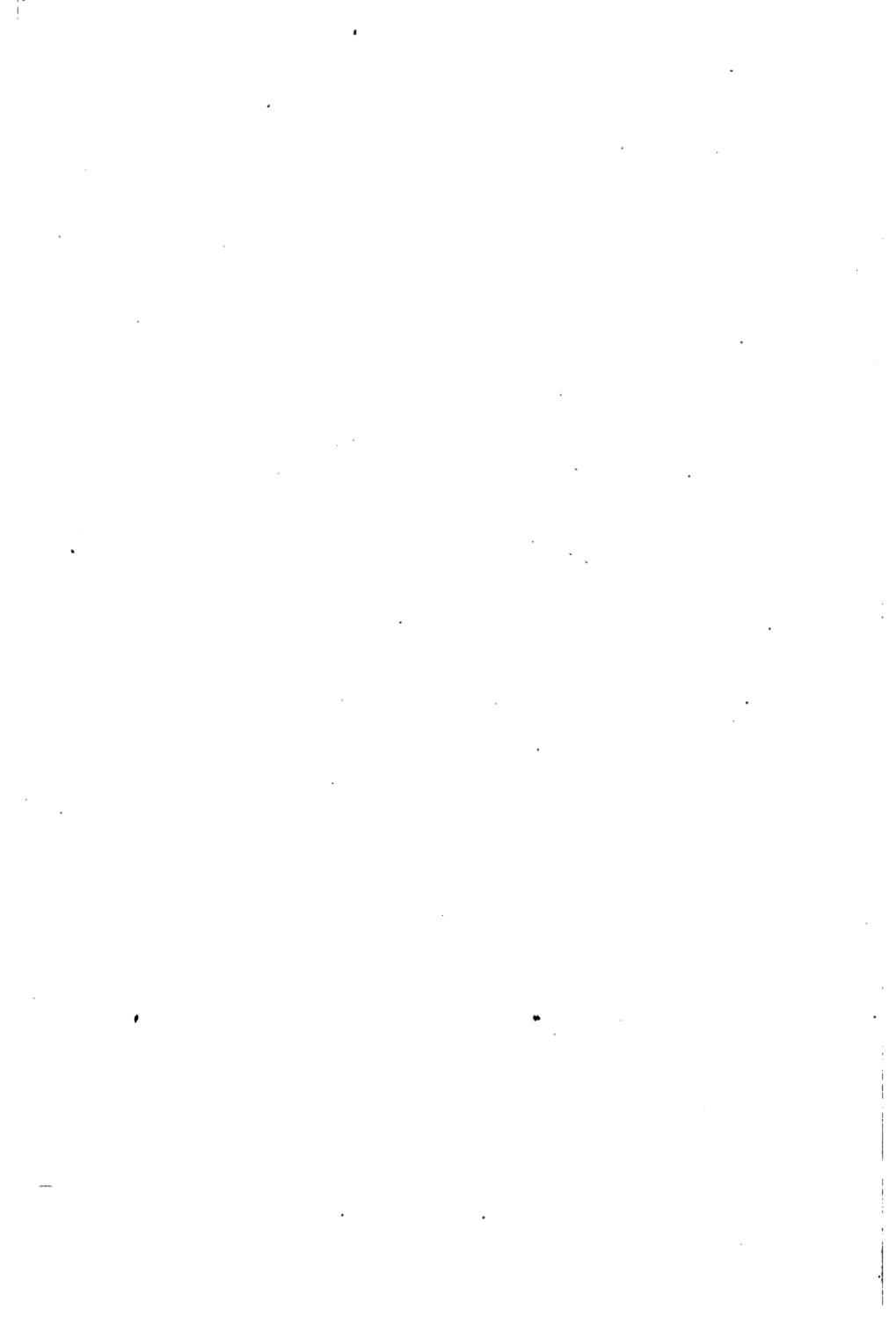
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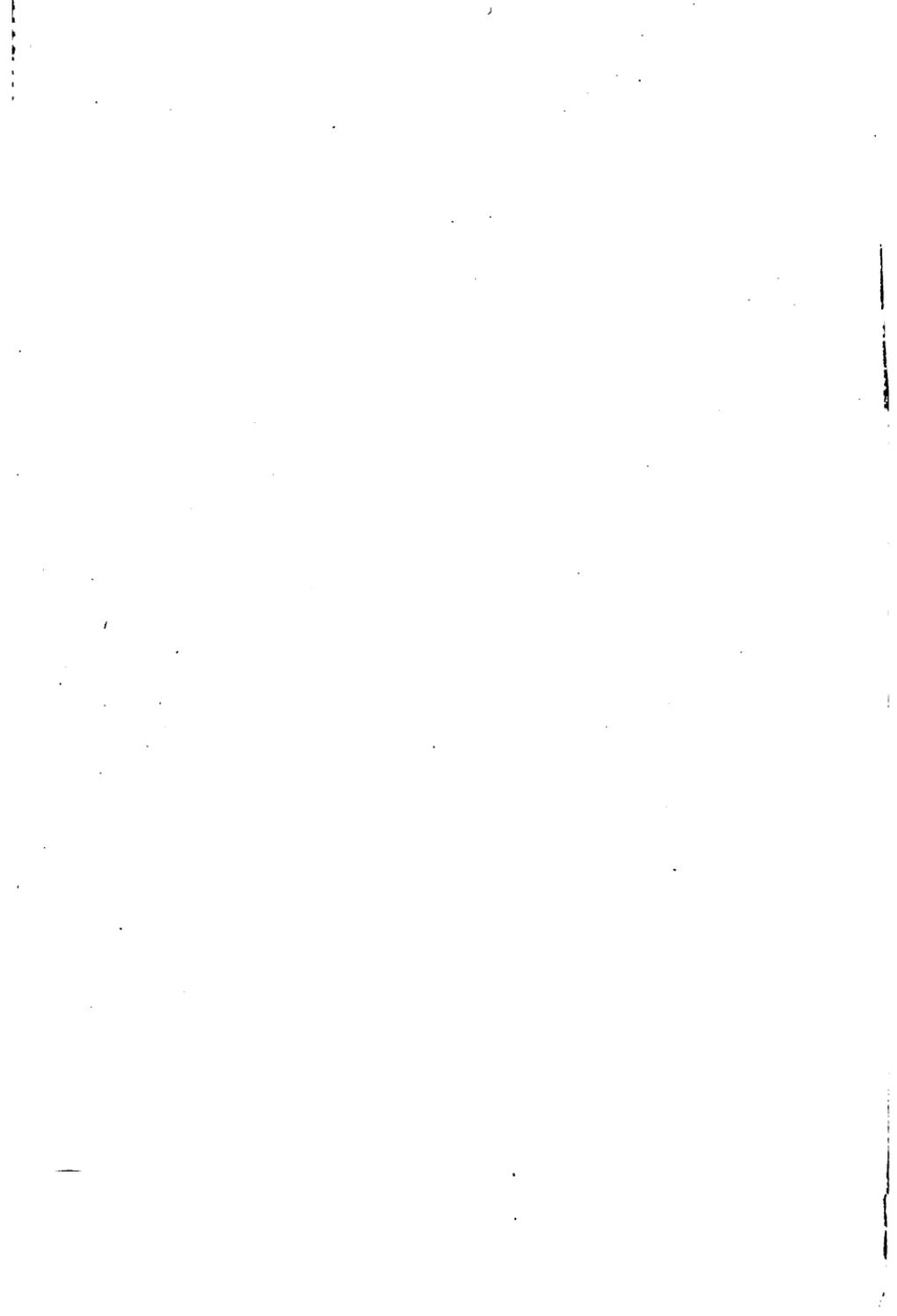
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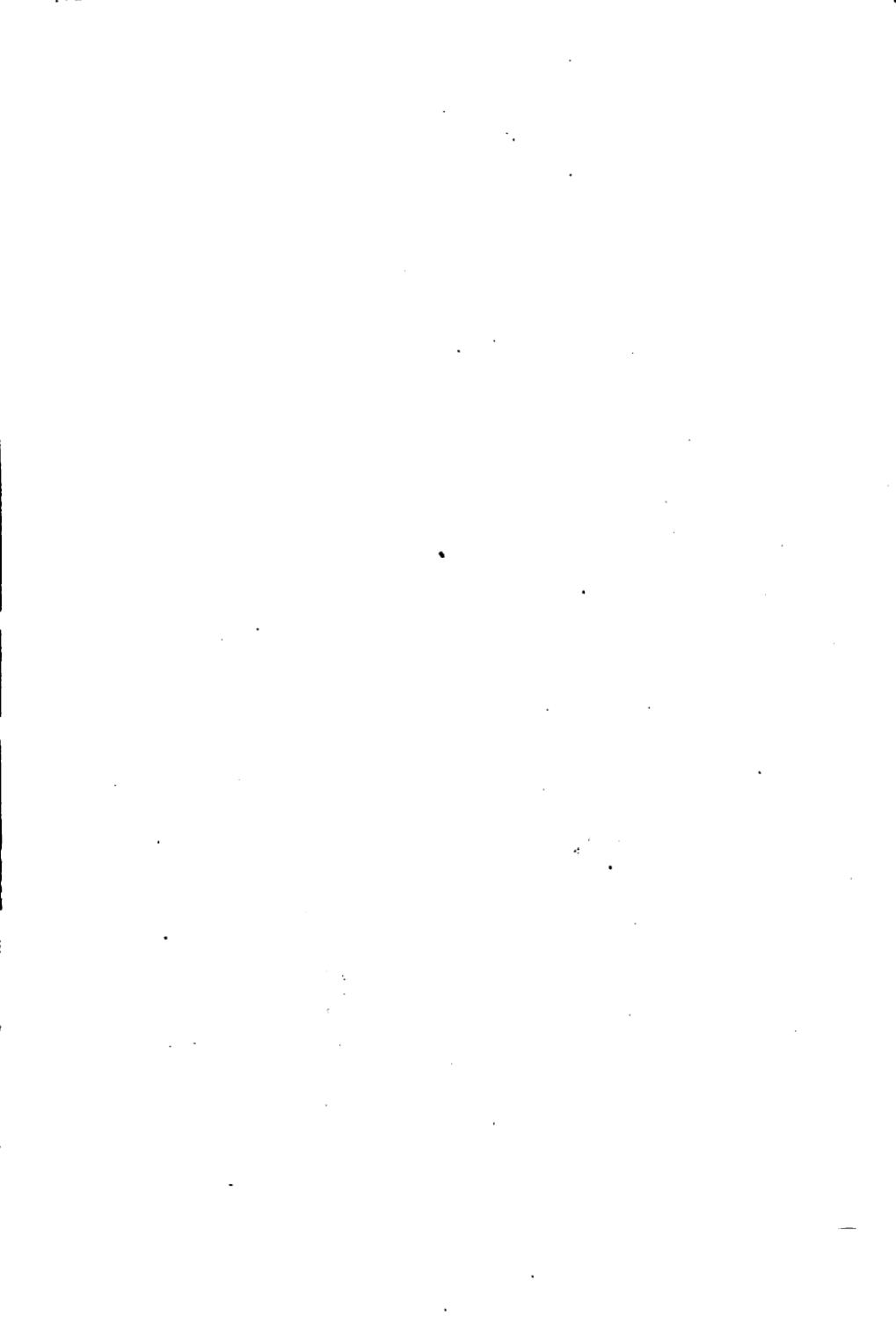






THE RIGHT TRACK







THE ONLY SON

THE RIGHT TRACK

BY

CLARA LOUISE BURNHAM

WITH FRONTISPICE BY
MARY GREENE BLUMENSCHIN



NEW YORK
GROSSET & DUNLAP
PUBLISHERS



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CHAPTER I

MAN PROPOSES

IN a cheap apartment on a side street of the city Mabel Ford and her brother stood near a window watching for the arrival of her successful suitor. The symmetrical face which had won him wore its habitual look of discontent.

Only two weeks had passed since the death of the invalid mother whose needs had hampered her life. Mabel Ford had always felt keenly how hardly Fate differentiates between the boys and girls in a family whose "bottom dollar" is always on top. Of course the decree had been that her brother must be educated, and even with all his own efforts the family resources were exhausted in putting Victor through college, and after he was admitted to the bar, in helping him to wait for the business so slow to come to a young lawyer.

While his mother had passionately admired the stamina with which Victor worked his way, turning his hand to any service he could render,

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Mabel, as passionately, had envied him. How willingly she would have sewed on buttons at five cents apiece, and sat up into the night working for her more fortunate sisters; but the home exigencies compelled her. She must cook and wait on an invalid during the precious years, while Victor had the joy of books and study, his time was respected, his future anticipated, and his mother's tired eyes brightened when they rested upon him. What wonder that his disposition was gay and bright, in spite of hard work and shabby clothes.

Mabel's heart often swelled seeing the pride in Victor shine in her mother's face. For herself, the heat and burden of the day; for him, the reward and praise. She did not know how her mother perceived her chafing and suffered; how she grew timid of offering caresses to a resigned daughter around whose neck she hung as a helpless burden.

At last one day the lawyer in whose office Victor had begun to work gave him charge of a case brought to them by one James Barnes, a successful dealer in grain. This gentleman of nearly fifty on one visit to the office encountered the sister of his young attorney. She was languid, unsmiling, and as blasé in manner as

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though the cheap fur that protected her throat were sable and a limousine with downy cushions awaited her descent to the street. What was wrong with James Barnes's eyesight that he could not perceive even at a glance that this girl was not one to sit opposite his good-natured face at breakfast and add to its good nature?

As the event proved, she never did sit opposite him at this early meal, preferring coffee in her room at a later hour.

However, on that day when he first gazed at the proud curve of her shabby shoulders and met the self-possessed glance she gave him at her brother's introduction, he said to himself: "That's a stunning girl. She'd know how to spend my money and spend it right." Which prompt soliloquy shows that James Barnes had been contemplating matrimony.

From that day, the most unexpected events occurred with swiftness.

Mrs. Ford died. Mr. Barnes attended the funeral, and the following day proposed to Mabel and was accepted, the young woman looking straight through his graying head upon an interminable vista of books which he certainly did not know were there, nor would he

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have opened the covers had they been visible; not possessing more than a bowing acquaintance with printed matter outside the daily papers.

The grain dealer was overjoyed by Mabel's quiet acceptance of him, and Victor heartily approved the match. The creaking and reluctant machinery of life, with always too little money to grease the wheels, had given him a tremendous respect for that lubricant, for his was a gayety-loving nature whose longings no amount of grinding and tutoring and shiny coats had been able to suppress. He had chafed quite as much as his sister, but ordinary manliness prevented him from showing aught but gratitude to his sacrificing womenfolk.

He had come to respect his grain-dealing client highly and to like him sufficiently to be rather staggered when James Barnes first unfolded to him his hopes. He was honestly afraid for him; so, while eagerly desirous of the suitor's success, he felt bound to make a faint demur.

"You honor us very much, Mr. Barnes," he said.

"Pooh pooh, my boy," returned his client.
"Youth and beauty will honor me if she'll take

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pity on my loneliness. My daughter is going away to school."

"You have a daughter?" asked Victor. "I knew there was a small Junior, but I have n't heard you speak of a daughter."

"Yes, Elaine's eighteen."

"Does she know — have you told her —"

"No, not yet," returned Mr. Barnes, his smooth-shaven face glowing optimistically; "but Elaine'll be delighted. She hates to go away and leave her little brother and me alone. But," his premature elation sinking, "do you believe your sister'll consider me, Ford?"

"I should certainly think she would," returned Mabel's brother with conviction, a trail of financial difficulties, years long, dragging past his mental vision.

But when the young woman announced to him that she had not hesitated, his elation was still mingled with apprehension.

"Now, see here, Mabel," he warned, "you play fair. Barnes is n't any highbrow and you know it beforehand. He's just a successful, clever operator on the Board and he does n't pretend to be anything else."

Mabel raised her eyebrows with a slight smile.

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"I don't know what barbarity you suspect me of. I'm not going to marry him loving somebody else."

"No, thank Heaven. For once, I'm grateful that you're as cold as a turnip."

"Thank you, brother."

The irony of her quiet tone did not prevent her companion from an unusual demonstration. He threw his arms around her.

"Mabel, I hope you'll be happy!" he exclaimed ardently. "I've never seen you happy. Now," he swallowed a lump, "dear little mother's at rest, you would n't have to work so hard, but I'm so slow getting business. Barnes is about the only client I can call a real one—and we can't exactly live on him?"

"I'm going to try," returned Mabel calmly, looking at the threadbare sleeve under her chin as Victor hugged her close, his appealing voice half-breaking as he spoke.

She patted his arm and he dropped it.

"It's too late for me to be happy—as I'd like to have been," she said in a different tone.

"How can it be too late for anything with you!" responded her brother, still with some effort to maintain a steady voice. "You're only two years older than I am."

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"Oh, but I feel a hundred. I wanted to go to college." It burst from her. She had never repined openly. "It was the only thing I wanted in the whole world. I wanted to be equipped for the world's work. I wanted to be an intelligent woman among intelligent women. I wanted to tingle with the wonderful free-masonry of sororities and college spirit." Her face lighted and shone and faded. "I can't. It's over. I drudged instead. I've been too tired and harassed at night for books." Her lips tightened and Victor looked at her, his own lips parted.

"Never mind," she added hardly after the brief silence. "We have a lawyer in the family; and I—I'm not going to drudge any more. There's the proof." She gestured toward the window near which they were standing. A motor car was drawing up before the door of the cheap apartment house. "That's going to be mine," she said, as they watched it.

"Do you know he has a grown daughter?" asked Victor, gazing gloomily.

"Yes. He wanted to surprise her with me, face to face. I would n't allow it. I made him promise to tell her. She'll hate me, of course; but she's going away to school."

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The last words were faint, and a yearning crept into them.

"Mabel!" exclaimed her brother acutely, "you make me feel like a thief."

His sister shook her head. "You need n't," she said. "You could n't help it."

Such satisfaction as Mabel Ford had taken in life consisted in a secret pride in her own heroism. In another day and place she told herself she might have been a Spartan mother. Now she was a Spartan daughter and sister. The white concern in her brother's face as they stood there together gave her a slight thrill of compensation. "It was not your fault," she continued. Then her colorless voice changed and she spoke hurriedly as she watched from the window:—

"He's getting out of the car. Let us go down. Don't let him come up here. Oh, I'm glad you're with me. It will make it easier to meet his children. I feel as if I were going to a funeral." And Victor, holding his sister's coat, felt a miserable culprit.

The bell buzzed in the apartment as the two went down the stair with its worn carpet.

The beaming face of their visitor espied them. He tried to moderate his exuberance as he met

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the dignified greeting of his loved one. Her black garb rebuked him. He observed that his young lawyer, too, looked pale.

"So good of you both to be ready," he said; and they all emerged into the dark September afternoon and out of its chill and gloom into the luxurious, shining limousine, a strange visitor in that street and one which had already brought several faces to neighboring windows.

Mabel sank back into cushions which seemed to embrace her softly in unsounded depths. Mr. Barnes's face questioned her exultantly as he took his place.

"Just a little gift for you, Mabel," he said. "Latest model. Do you like it?"

As the machine moved forward on velvet wheels, Mabel gave an unconscious sigh of satisfaction and rewarded her lover with a smile.

A swift, restful vision of all this stood for stole over her. No more careful keeping of accounts. No more wondering whether one might have a ragged chair re-covered. No more sordid knowledge of cheap dinners within a fireless cooker.

"It is perfect," she said.

"Like yourself," returned the grain dealer promptly; then he glanced across at the silent

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and pale young man whom he had always known so full of life. "Awfully cut up about his mother, poor chap," he reflected.

"You don't mind my spoiling your sister, I hope?" he asked.

"Mabel has had very little spoiling," replied Victor briefly. "It's coming to her."

Mabel did not speak. The thoughts behind her handsome, impassive face were occupied with the coming visit. Her mind was so habituated to resentment that this tinged her attitude toward the encumbrances belonging to the man who was about to relieve her of the embarrassments of life. It was tiresome that he should have a son and daughter; but then she had always been unlucky, and she could still bear and forbear. She prided herself on the fact.

Her eyes rested on the dainty appurtenances of the car and she wondered if Mr. Barnes's home were also a late model. Fortunately the wondering was half indifference, for the velvet wheels glided into a street from which fashion had turned, and stopped before a gray stone house in the middle of a block.

The drive had brought the color back to Victor Ford's face. His highly respected and genial client seemed as substantial as the walls

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of his own home. He seemed a promising bulwark to stand between Mabel and the hard world. Victor's eyes glanced sharply over the old-fashioned façade. If only the door would swing open and a bright girlish face appear with a welcome. Why should Mabel predict that Elaine Barnes would hate her and predict it with indifference? Why did Mabel always anticipate the disagreeable as if she were determined that unkind Fate should never get ahead of her?

The heavy door, however, remained closed and the exuberance of satisfaction which had illumined the host's face throughout the drive faded as his guests followed him up the stone steps, and a serious line came into his forehead as he fitted his latch-key into the door.

When they entered the gloomy hall it was vacant.

"Well, what's become of Elaine, I wonder," said Mr. Barnes, and it was evident to his companions that his loud tone was a warning. "I told her we'd arrive about—Oh, there you are, Bessie," he added as a neat maid emerged from the depths of the hall. "Take care of Miss Ford, will you? Bessie'll bring you down as soon as you're ready, Mabel. Your brother and

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I will be anxiously waiting." He smiled on his beloved with an expression which the maid noted for the benefit of her young mistress. Her alert eyes took in the cheapness of Mabel's mourning as they mounted the stairs. This she would not have to describe to Miss Barnes. Elaine could calculate to a hair the value of dry goods.

Victor followed his host into a comfortable den where an open fire glowed, and plump leather chairs extended welcoming arms. "I like a wood fire," said the grain dealer, opening and closing his hands before it. "Reminds me of the country. Know much about the country, Ford?"

"Not a bit," replied Victor, his ears strained for a sound of the approach of the daughter of the house. Perhaps she had waited upstairs for Mabel. Perhaps she preferred to meet her alone. Perhaps even now she had her arms about Mabel's neck. He wished his sister were not so undemonstrative. He hoped she would not throw cold water on a young girl's enthusiasm.

"Well, you miss a lot," declared Mr. Barnes reflectively. "I was brought up on a farm, not forty miles from here. Brierly. Ever hear of

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Brierly? Sweet Brierly I call it." The speaker smiled reflectively.

A good face, Victor considered. He could imagine a daughter of such a man as a sweet wholesome creature.

Perhaps she was at this moment shedding a few tears on Mabel's shoulder. He hoped his sister was responsive.

"Yes," he replied, "I think I have heard of Brierly. Shoe manufacturing place, is n't it?"

"Ye—es," drawled Mr. Barnes with lenient affection, "in a small way. Everything in Brierly grows in a small way — except trees — and huckleberries — and pasture rocks — All hustling life seems to flow by it on both sides. It stands like an island in a tumultuous sea. Some day I suppose a tidal wave will send trolleys banging through the streets; but when I saw the farm a year ago, it was still peaceful as a bird's nest."

"Is it your farm?" inquired the guest, his thoughts still abovestairs.

"No. It passed away from us some time ago. I've always hankered for it, though. Perhaps some day —" The speaker recollected himself with a start. "We must go into the other room," he said. "They'll bring Mabel there. I just

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wanted you to see this fireside where I hope you'll spend many an hour with me."

Victor followed his host out into the hall, and glanced up the staircase.

Mabel was descending. He looked eagerly at the figure following her; but it was the maid, Bessie.

"My dear," said Mr. Barnes, standing at the foot of the stairs and extending his hand in welcome; "we guessed just right. Have you seen Elaine?"

"No," replied Mabel, and she laid her cool hand in the outstretched one.

"Miss Elaine is in the drawing-room, Mr. Barnes," said Bessie.

"Very well. Where is Junior?"

"Miss Pinkerton is just undressing him, sir."

"Undressing him? Tell her to put on his clothes again and bring him down."

"He has n't been very well to-day and Miss Pinkerton thought —"

"He was quite well at five o'clock," said Mr. Barnes sternly. "Tell her to bring him down at once."

"Yes, sir," and the maid turned about and again ascended the stairs.

CHAPTER II

THE INTERLOPERS

JAMES BARNES's tone and manner gave his fiancée a little sense of satisfaction. At least she was going to marry a man; one who could n't be bullied by his womenfolk. Now, then, for Elaine. The inimical atmosphere was what she had expected. One must pay for everything in this weary world, it seemed.

She approached the entrance to the old-fashioned drawing-room, unfaltering. Not so her brother. He had fallen from a height, finding that the daughter of the house was still invisible, and he had felt his cheeks grow hot during the brief colloquy with the maid.

He viewed his sister's high-headed composure with wonder. They were interlopers. A repulse was in the very air of this gloomy house. He resented it, too. Mabel was a fine girl. What right had Elaine Barnes to condemn her unseen?

The host held aside the heavy portière for his guests to enter. The room was large. Gas-logs

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were flaming windily in the fireplace. The lights were high and uncompromisingly white. There was no coziness and little taste displayed in the stiff arrangement of the furniture.

A slender young girl stood there waiting; the white lights glinted on her blonde hair and made her thin, white face whiter. Her large blue eyes, set well apart, looked at the visitors composedly, and the folds of her creamy gown made no sound as she slowly advanced.

"Well, Elaine, you have kept us guessing," said her father with an effort at lightness. "This is Miss Ford and her brother, and this is my little girl." As he finished, Mr. Barnes threw his arm around the slight figure of his child, and tried by dint of his own warmth to bring some cordiality into the meeting.

Mabel's dark face and queenly stature made no appeal. Cold hands met in a murmur of greeting; while the host talked on.

"And this is my lawyer, you know, Elaine. Rather young head to carry all he knows, but he's right on the job, I tell you."

Victor touched the passively offered girlish hand while he saw the great blue eyes miss his own and take in the details of his appearance. He felt that they appraised the shiny buttons

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on his coat and knew just how soon the moulds would burst through their covering.

The night toilet of James Junior could not have been very far advanced, and Bessie must have given a spirited version of her master's order, for here Miss Pinkerton entered the room, leading her charge by the hand.

Miss Pinkerton was the factotum of the Barnes household, and the thunderbolt of Mabel's advent into the family life had splintered one of the most promising castles-in-the-air ever built by a middle-aged, enterprising, and rather engaging spinster. The lady had been but waiting for Elaine's departure to a fashionable New York school to perfect her situation in the home by becoming Junior's stepmother. She did not know that a man becomes at fifty most critical of her sex, or dream that her employer considered her pudgy and hated the way her pompadour dropped low on her forehead.

"Ah, Miss Pinkerton," said Mr. Barnes, suddenly beholding the piquant *nez retroussé* which always seemed peeking up at its owner's drooping hair as if apprehending eclipse. The father released his daughter.

"Mabel, I want you to meet Miss Pinkerton,

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chief prop and support of this old house of mine."

Miss Pinkerton acknowledged the introduction with a glance at Mabel's regal head, and then a stately bow, which ignored the flutter of the guest's uncertain hand; she stood immovable, holding tightly to her side a little boy of six.

As Mabel regarded her future stepson he glared at her balefully out of the tops of his gray eyes. He was pale and slender of face like his sister, and looked very small in his black velvet suit. "A sickly child!" thought Mabel, bracing herself; glad again of her own Spartan nature.

"And this is my baby!" declared Mr. Barnes, stooping to the little boy, and catching him from Miss Pinkerton's grasp into his strong arms. He carried him close to Mabel.

"Ain't a baby!" growled the youngster sullenly, still scowling at Mabel, who again put out an uncertain hand, wondering if she should pat the black velvet.

"This lady is going to be the best friend you have in the world," went on Mr. Barnes, unconsciously throwing darts into the breasts of daughter and housekeeper. "Kiss her, old chap."

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"I won't!" The child strained back in his father's arms, his eyes looking straight into Mabel's. "You kept my daddy downstairs," he said accusingly.

Mr. Barnes laughed. "That's where the shoe pinches, eh? Forgive him, Mabel. He's a nervous little chap and he's used to my going up to see him as soon as I come into the house."

Mabel felt that some gracious response was due from her. She lifted the child's little hand quickly and kissed it. The boy as quickly drew his other hand from about his father's neck and wiped off the caress with vigor.

"Does n't know when he's in luck," said Mr. Barnes, putting him down, and trying to conceal his annoyance. "Take him away, Miss Pinkerton; I'm ashamed of him."

Mabel colored a little, but spoke composedly, while Miss Pinkerton started to withdraw in triumph.

"Why should children be expected to like strangers? Junior *is* in luck; for he can still be honest," she said.

But the retreat was not accomplished so easily. The small boy broke from the restraining grasp, ran back to his father, and looked far up into his eyes.

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"Miss Pink'ton says you won't come upstairs," he said. "Kiss me good-night, Daddy."

His father folded his arms, and, looking down at him, shook his head. "No, you're not a gentleman."

Junior cast a furtive, resentful glance at Mabel.

"Can't be a gent'man till I grow up?" he said in gruff appeal to his father's reproachful eyes.

"Shake hands with dear Miss Ford and I'll kiss you," replied Mr. Barnes.

Junior again lifted the resentful gaze to Mabel's countenance. She tried to smile ingratiatingly and put out her hand. The child evidently strove with himself, but could not yield. With a stamp of his little foot he turned, and a big sob raised his chest.

Instantly springing forward, Elaine was on her knees beside him. "It's all right, Junior," she said, "sister'll kiss you." She tried to take him in her arms, but he pushed her away with all his strength and fled from the room. The embarrassment of the scene was not lessened by the revelation of how little the sister meant to the boy. Elaine colored consciously and Victor enjoyed her discomfiture.

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"It's of no use to show off a child at sleepy time," she said, with an affectation of carelessness; but she could not quite get back upon the pedestal she had determined not to quit; and meeting the speculative look in Victor's grave eyes, she turned with relief to the maid who at that instant announced dinner.

"You are going away to school," said Mabel, addressing the young hostess when the soup was removed. "Is it to college?"

"No," replied Elaine, with an affected lift of the head. "I don't wish to go to college."

Mabel felt the possibility of any bond between them vanish on the instant.

"Elaine has never been very strong," said her father, mentally deplored the girl's air, while he attacked the deliciously browned turkey set before him. "We have a native heath, Mabel. I was speaking to your brother about it. Little town of Brierly, only forty miles from here; but you'd think it was five hundred if you were set down on the farm. That's where Elaine was born. I had her spend this last summer with the Shanklins, some good neighbors of ours there, and drink milk and eat cream cheese to her heart's content."

"My heart's content!" repeated Elaine

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scornfully. "I would n't eat cream cheese to save my life. There was n't much content about vegetating in Brierly, I assure you."

"I thought I'd tone her up for this last winter in school," continued Mr. Barnes.

"It's a pity you're not going to college," said Mabel wistfully, gazing at the girl, who returned her look brazenly.

"Why?" she asked deliberately. "Because I'd be gone four years instead of one?"

Mr. Barnes struck in quickly. From his manner Victor wondered whether he even realized the incredible impertinence of this girl with the angelic coloring.

"I'd be willing, perfectly willing, to send Elaine to college," he pursued, struggling with a second joint. He believed Miss Pinkerton had purposely chosen a tough turkey. She had excused herself from the meal. "But this college business," he went on, "takes more staying power than Elaine's got. She's chosen a school in New York warranted to turn out a finished article."

"She has chosen well," said Victor quietly, his very good-looking eyes shining; "but do they guarantee the result?"

"Yes, oh, yes," laughed the host. "It's a

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little like the promise to give proficiency in the French language in twelve easy lessons; but at least they charge enough to make Elaine a wonder."

"She's a wonder now," declared Victor; and this time Mabel came to the rescue. She did not wish to see her brother break up her match with the table furniture and she judged from his tone that might come next. What was an impudent daughter more or less in her calculations? Was she not a Spartan?

"Victor knows that it was the desire of my life to go to college," she said pacifically.

"Glad you did n't, Mabel, glad you did n't," remarked the host heartily. "If you had gone, perhaps now you would n't look at a plain old fellow like me."

Elaine gazed at her father, her lips compressed. Did he not know that this statuesque creature, under thirty, was not looking at him? Never had looked at him, and never would? Two months ago he had been ignorant of her existence. Elaine, however, had become conscious of Victor's eyes. Each time she looked up she encountered their steady gaze. It intimidated her in spite of her contempt for his clothes, and his connivance in making her father absurd.

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A number of the speeches which she had planned to make dropped from her list.

She uttered one, however, and it took courage; but if her father were to be saved, this would save him. She and Victor were left alone for a moment just as the car came to the door. Mr. Barnes had gone upstairs with Mabel and taken her into the nursery to look upon Junior in his sleep. The baby face even now had a troubled look and Miss Pinkerton rocked excitedly in her chair when her employer insisted upon turning up the light.

As the engaged pair were coming downstairs dressed for the ride home, Mabel noted her brother standing, hat in one hand and the other on the doorknob as if eager to be gone, his eyes bent on the staircase.

"Elaine, Elaine," called Mr. Barnes, "we're off."

The cream-white gown came softly from between the dark velvet portières, and the girl held out her hand to Mabel who bade her good-night.

"Say good-night to Victor," said the host cheerfully. Of course the whole evening had been a hard spot, but after all it had not gone so badly. At any rate, the ice was broken. Everything would go swimmingly after this.

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Victor bowed curtly. "We've said good-bye," he remarked.

He believed it, too. No matter how soft the cushions of the limousine, no matter how assiduous the attentions of Mabel's lover, she would not persist after this evening in what had been a childish mistake on the part of both.

He could scarcely wait as he walked up and down the living-room of their apartment for Mabel to come upstairs. Her lover had detained her in the ill-lighted entrance for a last word, and to Victor the few minutes stretched to an hour.

At last he heard her light step ascending; but too slowly for his mood. Mabel looked up and saw him on the landing in the feeble light of the one gas-jet, and very slender and handsome he looked by contrast to the middle-aged figure which had just closed the door behind him.

"Dear old girl!" exclaimed the young fellow between his teeth. "I'd have come down after you in another minute." He hurried her inside the familiar walls. "Have you been telling him it's all off?"

Mabel smiled into his shining, questioning eyes as she removed her hat. "It *was* a villainous evening, was n't it?"

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"Well, did you tell him?" Victor shook her arm in his impatience.

"Certainly not. I don't believe it would do any good if I did. I believe he is capable of the young Lochinvar act, using the motor instead of a horse, of course."

"Mabel Ford, sit down," — the speaker forced his sister into a chair as he spoke. "We've both made a beastly mistake. If this experience has n't helped you to see it, then I must."

Mabel submitted to be seated and drove her hat-pin in and out of the ragged arm of her chair.

"Oh, he felt very sorry things had n't been pleasanter," she answered. "He just said so, and he begged me to overlook the shortcomings of the children. He said they had been systematically spoiled for five years and he had been helpless to prevent it; but everything would be different now."

"Everything won't be different now," responded Victor hotly. "Not through you. I won't allow it. We can be happy, Mabel." He looked down at the broad braid of her dark hair as he spoke appealingly. "We shall be free to go and come, and I'll devote myself to you."

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She lifted her drooping head and looked up at his flashing eyes with a faint smile. "We can't afford to go," she said; "and if you lose your only client, very soon we can't afford to come."

"I won't lose him. Jim Barnes is a good fellow. I'll tell him the whole thing."

"What whole thing? I'm sure this evening has resulted in no concealments. I told him just now that I thought I had made a mistake. I can see that I am letting myself in for a lot that's disagreeable. So it was easy to be honest. I told him that I was n't naturally a loving sort of person or adaptable, and that I really felt he would be giving me everything and I giving him very little; but he would n't listen."

"Well, he shall listen," retorted Victor fiercely. "You *are* giving him everything: your self-respect, Mabel, your self-respect."

"I don't see that. I've always thought that marriage should be a reasonable partnership. You've said yourself that Mr. Barnes's life was an open sheet; that every man you knew spoke well of him. The way he leaned over the boy to-night and kissed him in his sleep when we went into the nursery was very nice indeed. I envied him wanting to do it. He asked me to

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kiss the child; but I could n't have kissed that monkey for forty limousines."

"How could you refuse?"

"Oh, it was easy. I simply said that it would be taking an unfair advantage."

"You're clever," declared Victor gloomily; "but you can't go on," he continued, with rising wrath.

"I've made up my mind, Victor."

"Then I'll unmake it." The speaker clinched his fists. "I have something to tell you about Elaine."

"What a beautiful dress that was she wore," said Mabel calmly, "and what a relief it was when her father persuaded her to sit down at the piano. She plays remarkably well."

"Damn her playing!" exploded Victor, and Mabel raised her eyebrows and stared at him. The whole key of their household had been low and gentle for the sake of the invalid. She had never seen her brother so excited. "Listen to this," he went on. "It was just before Mr. Barnes brought you downstairs to come away. Miss Barnes was standing there enduring me with that white-paper face of hers when all of a sudden she said: 'Your sister looks like a girl who is strong and well.' 'She is,' I replied; and

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just then you and Mr. Barnes appeared at the head of the stairs. She glanced up at you; then back straight at me with those blue marbles of eyes. ‘I should suppose she would rather work,’ she added calmly.”

Victor strode up and down the brief limits of the room and a slow color rose and flooded his sister’s face. She did not move, but the restless hand making reckless holes with the hat-pin became still.

“And, by Jove, you should, Mabel!” exclaimed Victor, coming to a standstill before her. “Now, then!”

He waited for the storm. None broke. Mabel met his dilated eyes. “I think this is work,” she replied calmly; “hard work. Perhaps I shan’t do it well. I fancy I’m not fitted for it.”

“You’re not, Mabel. The woman that goes into that home should have by nature such a flood of the milk of human kindness that everybody in the house would wade in it, up to his knees, every time he made a move.”

Mabel’s gaze grew thoughtful. “I believe you’re exactly right,” she said. “It’s wonderful for you to think that out.”

Victor met her hopefully. “You’re a brick, Mabel, and all that; but there is n’t any gush

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to you. You're a — a — I hate to say it, but in that household you'd be a — a cold proposition. Don't you think so yourself?"

Mabel nodded slowly. "The trouble is," she answered after a silence, "that Mr. Barnes won't listen to it. He says Elaine will be gone, and Miss Pinkerton will take full charge of Junior and — Oh, Victor," in a burst of frankness, "I'd hate to give it all up, and settle down again to — this!" She plucked scornfully at the ragged chair-arm.

"Then Elaine has a perfect right to her contempt," returned the brother, hot again. "She knows that you and her father have scarcely become acquainted; and she knows you're not in love with him."

"And he knows it," answered Mabel persuasively. "There's no deceit anywhere. I'm twenty-eight, Victor. I know my own mind."

He sank into the chair and dropped his face in his hands. "And you have n't any heart," he said with a groan of discouragement.

He was near and she leaned forward, resting her hand on his shoulder.

"It's too much for you to ask me to give it up," she said with feeling. "You were willing enough yesterday. What has happened?

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Nothing but the temper of two jealous children. Trust me, dear old boy. We'll both be happier than we would be, disappointing Mr. Barnes so frightfully. He said he would have given half his kingdom to have secured us a pleasanter evening. He should n't be punished, should he?"

She waited a moment; but no reply or movement came from her brother.

"I'll be able to do a lot for you, Victor," she added, rather timidly.

Now he looked up. "Do you suppose I shall ever go into that house again?" he demanded. "You have been insulted."

"Not unless I think so," replied Mabel quietly. "That ill-bred little chit can't insult me. Have a talk with Mr. Barnes about it, if you like. You'll find there are two ways to look at the circumstances; but my advice would be not to stir up the father against the child any further. He is sufficiently displeased with her already."

Silence again, while Victor gazed moodily at the faded rug.

"This will mean a lot to you in a business way, Victor," pursued Mabel. "Mr. Barnes says so."

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"He's lavish with his bait, anyway," sneered her brother. "All I want is for you not to be miserable. It is n't too late to throw up the whole thing; and my advice is for you to do it."

His sister, watching alertly for a sign in her favor, thought she perceived a weakening.

"Don't I know you'd do anything for me you could? Go to bed and sleep on this. If you want to talk to Mr. Barnes in the morning and forbid the banns, go ahead and do it."

Victor looked into his sister's eyes with a straightforward, manly regard.

"If you'll back me, I will do it; but if you're against me, I'm not such a fool."

Mabel rose with a smile. "I am against you, Victor. I am strong and well as Elaine Barnes said; strong enough to go through with it."

Then as her brother rose, and looked at her, speechless, she took hold of the lapel of his coat and continued softly: "Elaine goes to school next week. He wants to be married quietly the day after. He wants to give me a beautiful gown, worthy, he says, of — oh, no matter — a beautiful gown, all white."

Victor's face flushed. "He'll not give you a gown till you belong to him."

"But, Victor," Mabel's voice was very

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gentle, "you can't blame him for not wanting me to be in black at my wedding."

"All right." Victor's hurt made his voice rough. "Sell out everything here. I don't care what you do. We'd boil down to a few dollars, I suppose, and get yourself a white dress."

Then Mabel used the little phrase which from all time has given the masculine heart an impulse toward living up to expectations. Her voice was grateful.

"You're always so good to me, Victor."

CHAPTER III

CAMILLA LOVETT

SPRING in Brierly. Forty miles away in his office James Barnes considered the fact with some sentiment when occasionally a balmy breath of air strayed in at his window; but there was little sentiment over April at the parsonage where Charity, better known as Cherry, Shanklin, shivered in the back yard while she helped her brother Cyrus plant their little garden. They did intensive farming, although they did n't call it that. Beside the house a small orchard of apple trees grew as they listed, with gnarled trunks as deeply lined as the unsmiling countenance of the minister. The front yard of the white house was shaded with two good maple trees, and some flowering shrubs were budding hardly in the April sunshine. Charity bordered her garden path with pinks and pansies and sweet alyssum and had sweet peas climbing about the porch when June came, but now a reminder of snow was still in the air and she pulled her woolen sontag closer around her

Camilla Lovett

as she stood in the wind, consulting with her brother as to the best disposition of their bit of fertilized ground.

Cyrus Shanklin had filled the pulpit at Brierly for thirty years. His short gray beard, deeply lined cheeks and hollow eyes rising above the great church Bible were a solemn reminder to every child in Brierly of the necessity of decorum in the sanctuary. His sister's attitude toward him, although she was his junior by a decade, was that of protection and a sort of habitual compassion. As they stood there discussing lettuce, beets, and parsnips, the dissimilarity of their features was apparent. The long nose, the high forehead, and the gray eyes of the man spoke resignation; while his sister's plump, round countenance and sharp little eyes expressed enterprise. Not even the steady daily pressure of her brother's patient discouragement had been able to break the spring of Charity's interest in life, although she had not escaped a tinge of pessimism, and her tongue commanded fear as well as respect.

"Do come into the house, Cyrus," she said at last. "We've been at it for two hours. That's enough." She pointed her adjuration with a sneeze and hurried up the path toward her

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warm kitchen. There she washed her hands and looked into a small mirror hanging over the table to smooth back the very few hairs which were able to make their escape from a coiffure which was strictly utilitarian and as firm and thorough as all of Charity's undertakings.

There was still an hour before dinner and there were napkins to be hemmed; so Miss Shanklin repaired to the dining-room and pulled her work-basket toward her favorite rocking-chair by the window. This window was one of the "village watch-towers" which keep one in touch with life. Owing to a little jut in the architecture of the white house, it commanded a view of the street, and Charity ruthlessly cut away branches of the lilac bush which would have hidden her gate. She had sat there but a few minutes and gone across but half one side of a napkin when her eyes, frequently up-glancing, caught sight of a short figure on the walk.

"Why, that steps like —," she said aloud and laid down the napkin, looking over the tops of her steel-bowed spectacles; "it surely does — but it can't be —" The short figure stopped at the gate, opened it, came in and started up the garden path. "It is Camilla Lovett!" exclaimed Miss Shanklin, not joyously, but with some

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excitement. She jumped up and hurried out on the side porch.

"Camilla!" she called, and the visitor abandoned the path to the front door and came around toward the porch. Her step was long and her head held erect in the manner of those on whom nature has laid a burden. The folds of her coat at the back hung over a slight protuberance between the shoulders; but that same nature had given her the wavy hair and sound teeth which made the little woman's face pleasant to look upon as she smiled now at her hostess.

"I declare," thought Miss Shanklin, "I never saw Camilla look so kind o' pretty."

"Where in the world did you spring from?" she asked, holding out her hand.

"New York," returned Camilla, coming up the steps. "You knew, did n't you, that I'd been there the last year?"

"I heard so. Come in, come in," said Charity heartily, her hospitality spurred by lively curiosity. "You must stay to dinner with us."

"Oh, I didn't come just at dinner-time, did I, Cherry?" The question was put with apology.

"No, not for an hour yet; but I've got pork

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and beans and brown bread, and I remember you like 'em even though they do fight you."

As she spoke Charity led the way into the house and helped the visitor off with her coat and hat and Camilla looked about reminiscently. "Is that the very same scarlet geranium?" she asked.

"Yes, or its sister; I don't remember. Get out o' that chair, Daisy." As she spoke the hostess brushed away a black cat with a white nose and a soft bunch of white under her chin, who was using the second-best chair in the room.

"New York's done real well by you, Camilla," said Charity, looking her guest over from head to foot. "You're so spruced up I'd hardly know you. You look in good keeping, too. You used to be so sallow with that dyspepsia of yours."

"I was, that's so," agreed Camilla. "To-day you'll see the brown bread has more cause to be afraid of me." She took the rocking-chair offered by her hostess.

"That's the very place you sat the last time I saw you," said Charity, taking the seat vacated by Daisy, who was giving her aggrieved glances and meditating her lap as a haven.

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"Get out, get out," she said abstractedly, pushing her pet away as it came near.

"You were hemming napkins," said Camilla, looking at the fallen work. "Give me one and let's go on."

"After dinner, maybe," said Charity. "I want to talk now. You were sitting right in that chair, putting the braid on my black silk skirt the last time I saw you. I remember, because you were coming next day to do a lot of stitching for me on the machine, and you never came."

Camilla smiled into the sharp little eyes and shook her head. "No, I've come now to apologize."

"Are you at Mrs. Emerson's again? She was the one that told me you got a letter that hurried you off to New York. I expected to hear from you, but I never did. I used to say to Cyrus, if it was anybody but Camilla, she'd write and explain; but Cyrus never would let me blame you for your disposition. You don't mind my speaking plainly, Camilla. He said the hand o' the Lord had been laid heavy on you and 't was human to rebel. You do look so kind o' different that I can see you're happier and better off. Ain't it a wonder that the

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color of a body's skin can change 'em so? Oh, these stomachs! You can sympathize with Cyrus. There's so many things he can't eat, it makes it awful hard to cook for him. Well, now tell me all about it."

Miss Shanklin leaned back in her chair and rocked furiously in anticipation of the sating of her curiosity.

"I was pretty cross-grained, was n't I?" said Camilla with pensive eyes.

"I should say so. If I wanted a collar made bias, I used to ask you if you did n't think 't would fit better on the straight; then I got it just the way I wanted it."

"Poor little Camilla," said the visitor, smiling tenderly as if to herself.

"Jim Barnes was out here a few weeks ago and was askin' about all the neighbors and he asked about you; asked if you was just as even-tempered as ever,—mad all the time. You know Jim will have his joke; he remembered the way you used to snap him up; but he was just like Cyrus; said it was n't any fault o' yours. He said when English folks wanted to describe an ugly-tempered person, they said he had a hump. Of course, you have n't got a—so to say a real hump, Camilla," the addition

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was made as the hostess saw color come up in the delicate cheeks. "You're just kind o' high on the shoulder-blades; but everybody felt 't was enough to make you sort o' crotchety."

"It did make me crotchety," returned Camilla quietly; "so crotchety that I became dyspeptic."

"Oh, no; that was sittin' so much, sewing," declared Charity; "but never mind. That has n't anything to do with your going to New York."

"Perhaps it had," said the visitor. "You'd never guess what it was that made me more irritable and disagreeable with every year that passed."

"Why, dyspepsia, of course. You were awful careless about your pepsin and you kept gettin' worse; and then your back — I expect it was achin' lots o' times when you jawed folks." Charity spoke with reasonable sympathy and her flying rockers made Daisy beat a retreat.

"The ache was in here," Camilla pressed her hand on her heart and met her hostess's eyes full. "It came over me slowly that I should n't ever marry."

"Law! That ain't anything." Charity's

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amazement was mingled with resentment. "Look at me. I ain't married; but I don't bite folks's heads off just for that." Then, curiosity submerging resentment, "Who'd you want to marry, Camilla? Since you've said that much you might as well make a clean breast of it. 'T won't go any further."

"It was n't anybody in particular," replied the visitor simply. "I just wanted a baby."

Miss Shanklin's rocking-chair came to a standstill with such suddenness that nothing but the weight of her own plump, comfortable upholstery kept her from being thrown out.

"Camilla Lovett, how you talk!" she ejaculated.

Camilla nodded slowly and even in the chaos of Miss Shanklin's shocked sensibilities she was struck by the sweet expression in her visitor's steady eyes.

"Yes, I was hungry, hungry for a child; and I grew very angry with a God who would put such a hunger in my heart and then put the heart into an unlovely body."

"Why, Camilla," gasped Miss Shanklin. "I should think you'd have expected a thunderbolt!"

"I did n't care. I was wretched and reckless

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and miserable and sick when the letter arrived from New York from a distant relative who hadn't seen me for years. She asked me if I could come and take care of her house and her two-year-old baby while she and her husband went away for a long trip which the doctor had prescribed. I did n't stop to think or plan. I packed in the night and left in the morning; left to get my arms around that girl baby; a baby that was to be all mine for a little while; a baby that would n't care how I looked."

"Well!" exclaimed Charity with a long breath. "Mrs. Emerson did tell the truth, then. She said you went to be a housekeeper. You've stayed there the whole year?"

"Yes."

"It's agreed with you something wonderful. You're goin' back?"

"No. My relatives have returned, the baby's mother strong and well. They don't need me."

"But ain't you goin' to be awful homesick for that baby?"

Sudden dew sparkled in the visitor's brown eyes and they smiled through it. She nodded, speechless.

"But you ain't mad about it, Camilla."

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Charity's tone was wondering. "That change was just what you needed, surely. What you goin' to do now?"

"I don't know."

"Goin' to stay in Brierly? Goin' to sew again, Camilla?"

"I can't say yet. I have a feeling, though, that I'm not. The last year has been wonderful in so many ways, Cherry." The speaker regarded the round face of her companion, still flushed with surprise, as if doubtful how much to say to her. "It has taught me," she added, "to leave the old Camilla behind."

"You do look as if you'd shed your old skin," said Miss Shanklin, "and I can see you've come where you're willin' to bow to the decrees o' Providence; and so you don't know what you are goin' to do?" pursued Charity.

"No; but as you just said, I shall abide by the decree of Providence. God will show me what to do."

Miss Shanklin had begun to rock again, the conversation having veered to familiar ground. Now she stopped. Such an expression from Camilla Lovett was more surprising than her fair complexion and clear, contented eyes.

"So you got religion in New York," she said;

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then added with a curious resentment: "Brierly religion was n't good enough for you, it seems."

Camilla smiled at the flushing face. "You talked very plainly to me a few minutes ago, Cherry," she replied; "so you won't mind if I say that religion in Brierly never seemed a very happy thing."

"It's gay in New York, I suppose," said Charity acidly; "gay like everything else."

"It's happy," returned her friend, "in some places — the places where I got it." Then, after the silence that followed, she added softly: "You remember you told me once that your good brother sometimes had wakeful nights, fearing he might not be one of the elect."

Charity rocked fast again. She did not know exactly how to reply. Camilla had no business to remember a thing like that. Her brother's lined face, hollow-cheeked, hollow-eyed, appearing above the pulpit, rose before her mental vision. It symbolized a religion which this visitor had renounced. Religion in Charity's own experience had been a commodity the reverse of lucrative, which must be purveyed once a week and patiently and discreetly handled. It involved much doing-up of linen and brushing of old coats and untiring ingenuity in making both

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ends meet; but it was the religion of her fathers, and that Cyrus could n't take it as philosophically as she did was his misfortune.

"My brother is good," she said shortly,—"as good a man as ever lived."

"He is, I'm sure," agreed Camilla; then willing to make a diversion she continued: "You said Jim Barnes was out here. How is he looking?"

"Well, he's like everybody else: he don't grow any younger. Still he looks in good keep-ing in spite of his wife."

"What do you mean by that?"

"Oh, he did n't say much, but I've heard. She 't was Hetty Landor,—you remember Hetty; well, she married a good-for-nothin' clerk in the city and she's had to go to sewin'; and she's been doing mendin' and such-like for the new Mrs. Barnes. She came out here lately and told me about it. Says she's awful high-headed and absent-minded, and don't know nor care how the house runs. Just reads from mornin' till night. Don't it beat all how one man's meat is another man's poison? Jim's got a little boy five or six years old, and Hetty says she feels to pity that child."

Camilla leaned forward in her chair.

Camilla Lovett

"I knew Jim had a daughter. I never heard of the little one."

"Law, yes. You did know that he came before he was invited and 't was his birth took Lucy Barnes away. You've forgotten. Lucy was a real loss to Jim. She was my cousin, you know, and as sensible as they make 'em. Jim's done just what fool men usually do, married a woman half his age, and he's reaping' the consequences. Hetty said there did n't seem to be any men around the new wife except her brother, but that'll probably come later."

"Oh, Cherry, don't talk that way!"

"Now, why could n't he have married — say you, for instance," went on Charity. "Then he'd 'a' had a mother for his children worth talkin' about. When a man marries the second time, it ought to be for his children's sake, not his own."

"Can't the daughter be a help?" asked Camilla. "Seems to me Ellen must be nearly grown up."

"Ellen!" Miss Shanklin paused in her rocking just long enough to purse her lips. "I had Ellen here with me all through July — for my sins, I guess. Jim just swears by Brierly and he thought 't would do his dear little girl good!"

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Pen cannot describe the satirical tone of this declaration.

"I'm sorry if she disappointed you," said the guest.

"That girl, Camilla Lovett! Well! I think with her and the hifalutin wife, Jim Barnes's collection is just about complete. She's the most air-y individual that ever looked in the glass. In the first place, you must n't say Ellen any more. Dear me, no! She calls herself Elaine!—Elaine, mind you! 'Cousin Cherry,' " Charity imitated a most affected drawl, " "would you mind letting me have my breakfast in bed? Father wishes it!" "

The speaker drew herself up for her dramatization, and then rocked to the limit as she proceeded:—

"The cat's foot and the kitten's elbow!" I says to her. 'You don't need your breakfast in bed any more'n I do. When you're sick, I'll take care of you. You ain't sick now; you're just pale from bein' shut up in the house and schoolrooms. What you need's exercise.' 'I believe I'll get a horse,' says Ellen; 'I've been to ridin'-school.' 'Well, get a horse,' says I, 'and ride up to Elm Farm every day. Your father sets store by every leaf and twig on that

Camilla Lovett

old place. The folks there won't mind you. I'll tell 'em you're harmless. Go up there and ride around and write your father how things look.' — Oh, well," Charity sighed, "we got through with it somehow. Ellen was a kind o' nice *little* girl. I used to like her when she came here with her mother."

"But can't she take care of that little brother?" asked Camilla, in whose mother-heart rankled the reference to the small boy.

"Law, no. She went to New York to school, time her father was married. A pity she could n't find some o' your religion there!" finished Charity tartly.

"I wish she could, poor child," returned Camilla.

"No; James Junior's kind o' lost in the shuffle, from what Hetty says. There was a woman there takin' care of him the time o' the weddin' and I s'pose she'd pretty well run things and did n't like the reins bein' taken away. There was some kind of a tussle and she left soon after the marriage, and there's been a procession of women since, all sizes and ages, but nobody stays very long. Little Jim's an awful disagreeable child, Hetty says; kind o' sickly and cross, and Mrs. B. has her nose in a

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book all the time; you can just imagine the way things go."

"And did n't Jim speak to you of his troubles when he was here?"

"Not a word. Of course I asked after his wife and he said she was very well; but his errand in Brierly seemed to be to look at the farm again. Never saw anything like the way that busy, rich man clings to that old place where he used to go coastin'. Seems if he must see it once in so often."

"How strange that Mrs. Barnes did n't come with him."

"He said he tried to get her to, but that day there was a meetin' of one of her clubs and she could n't come very well. You see!"

"I'm sorry," said Camilla, and her brown eyes seemed to gaze far away.

"Say, Camilla," said Charity suddenly, "I wonder if you would be so good as to look over my old suit and see if you think the sleeves could be changed to be something like yours. Yours are so pretty; just as pretty as they can be."

"I'd be glad to," replied the visitor, and Charity rose with alacrity and led the way into her bedroom.

CHAPTER IV

IN THE OFFICE

JAMES BARNES was in his private office in a quiet part of the day. On his desk stood the picture of a handsome woman, a broad dark braid of hair crowning her head above the low broad forehead. There was a good space between this picture and two other photographs in a folding leather case, which he suddenly took down for closer inspection. There were lines in his forehead as he gazed. The young girl in the white gown he passed over lightly; but his eyes fixed on the picture of the small boy sitting on one leg with the other foot dangling in front of him. Mr. Barnes studied the face and the plump legs. The stricture in his breast brought a deeper frown.

"He's running down. The boy's running down," he muttered. "There is n't a doubt of it."

The photographer had evidently succeeded in showing some object which won approval from the child, for the face wore an expression of interest which for some reason brought

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a stinging sensation to the grain dealer's eyelids.

He recalled the petulant little voice that greeted him at night, and remembered how listless had been the reception of the mechanical toy he had carried home last evening.

"A man's a clumsy brute," he said to himself, swallowing the obstruction in his throat; then he muttered above his breath to the eyes looking at him: "I'd give all I've got to buy you what you need, little chap; but I can't get a line on it. And if I could, money won't buy it even if it's on earth; and I guess it is n't. I guess all our share is in the burying-ground at Brierly. My little boy!" The eyelids stung afresh and the grain dealer pressed the top of the leather case he held against them.

A knock sounded on the door. He hurriedly replaced the photographs on top of the desk, and was blowing his nose when Victor Ford entered the room.

The young lawyer's appearance indicated that the past nine months had seen him ascend several rungs of the business ladder.

"Busy, Mr. Barnes?" he asked, pulling a bunch of papers out of his pocket as he advanced alertly.

In the Office

At the same moment the grain dealer drew some papers toward himself from the back of his desk. "Very," he replied gruffly, without turning around.

The young man stopped, uncertainly. He and his mature brother-in-law were excellent friends. "Anything wrong?" he asked.

"I've got a cold. I should think you could see that." Mr. Barnes blew his nose again. "Lovely spring usually brings us a little souvenir of that kind, you know. What do you want, Ford?"

He had himself in hand now and looked up into the face of the young man standing by his desk.

"Why, I'd like to know what's troubling you, if you're willing to tell me," returned Victor frankly. The undercurrent of anxiety which had disturbed him throughout the winter bubbled up.

"You're a mind reader, eh? Well, I don't mind telling you. I've been feeling worried about Junior lately. Sit down." Victor obeyed. "You've been seeing the youngster at least once a week all winter. I'm interested to know if you notice a sort of — a sort of — well, decline in him, you might say."

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Relief soothed Victor's fear. If it was only Junior!

"Why, I can't say I have noticed anything like that, Mr. Barnes. Are n't children always pale when they're growing?"

"Are they? I suppose they are. We lost two children between Elaine and Junior. I guess I'm pretty nervous."

"Is Mabel worried about him?"

At the question Mr. Barnes turned away and picked up a paper-knife. "No, oh, no; I don't think Mabel is worried about him."

"Of course, Mabel does n't know much about children," said Ford, the creeping anxiety moving again in his depths.

"No," replied Mr. Barnes, "and we have n't been fortunate in finding the right person to take care of the boy. There has been an assortment of women since Miss Pinkerton left, and I don't like the present incumbent at all. She seems a sly, flattering sort to me; but Mabel likes her better than any one we've had and thinks we'd better let well enough alone."

"I'm sorry," said Victor gravely. The two pairs of eyes met, and glanced away again suddenly.

In the Office

Presently Victor looked back at his companion.

"I'm more than sorry," he blurted out, speaking quickly; "sorry my sister is n't a better housekeeper, a better mother, a better home-maker. I have eyes and I must say it once."

The lines of the older man's face changed and his eyes, gazing into Victor's, turned cold.

"If you ever say it again, or anything approaching it, our relations cease. Do you understand?"

"Yes — I — yes," stammered Ford.

"The beam in your own eye, young man, requires some attention," went on Mr. Barnes, without giving the other time to recover from his embarrassment. "I have no jurisdiction over you, but I'm your friend and I simply tell you that you're making the first moves on one of the slipperiest toboggan slides on the planet."

Victor grew scarlet, and looked with apprehension into his brother-in-law's face.

"I have n't tried to keep tabs on you in any way, but it has come to me straight — the suppers at Florio's and the games at Baxter's. I've been able to give you a lift. Is this what you're going to do with it?"

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Victor rose and paced the floor in silence.

"I suppose I know your circumstances pretty well, and the very fact that you can visit those places a second time shows me that you are playing in luck, as they say; though the devil knows worse luck never befell a man."

The young lawyer was very white as he suddenly paused again by the desk and met the cool gray eyes.

"Have you told my sister?" he asked.

Mr. Barnes, leaning back in his chair, returned his gaze for a silent moment.

"That's a fool question, boy," he replied at last quietly; "but your sister has told me much that throws light on your actions."

Victor wondered what was to come.

"She has told me of all the pinching and sacrifice; of your pluck and self-denial. There need n't have been any reaction. Some fellows similarly placed have the stamina to keep on climbing. You were n't that sort. You find yourself for the first time without saddle or bridle or burden; with no sense of responsibility; and you're scampering and kicking up your heels in the green fields adjoining the path of duty in which you've been held till now; and you think you're having a good time because

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you're calling it freedom. "T is n't freedom, though. It's slavery."

Mr. Barnes's dry voice paused a moment, then went on. "I like you, Victor, and I'm telling you. That's all."

Color surged high again in the young lawyer's face. He started to speak, but apparently could not. Just as he was moving toward the door, uncertain whether he was most angry or most ashamed, a knock sounded again, and at once Mr. Barnes's stenographer entered the room. She was bringing a card.

Her employer waved her away. "I'm busy," he said; "I can't see anybody."

"I told her that, sir, and I asked her her business, but she said it was only to see you and she insisted on my bringing in the card."

"Send her away. Don't you know better by this time than to bother me with agents or beggars in business hours?"

The stenographer lifted her head. "I do," she returned, much injured. "She is n't a beggar nor an agent. They don't usually write, 'For Auld Lang Syne' on their cards, I believe."

James Barnes took the rejected pasteboard and looked at it.

He gave an exclamation. "Watch the clock,

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please, Miss Perkins, and send her in here in five minutes," he said. "You did quite right."

Miss Perkins's backbone was extremely rigid as she left the room. As the door closed, her employer rose. "You remember my speaking to you of Brierly, Ford? This woman who is calling on me is Brierly's prize sour ball, Camilla Lovett. I heard she was in New York, not in our town. Well, poor little thing! perhaps counter-irritants are good things. Any-way, she knows Brierly, and it'll be a diversion to hear her beat up the inhabitants."

"Then I'll leave you to your diversion, Mr. Barnes," said Victor.

"Like to have you meet her," returned the grain dealer.

"Thank you, I feel that I don't require her specialty just at present," said Victor stiffly; and then the door opened and Miss Perkins ushered in the visitor.

Victor glanced at her, and even in his disturbance felt some surprise at the childlike stature of such a fierce character. But he succeeded in slipping away while Camilla looked about, a little awed by what to her inexperience seemed the pomp and circumstance surrounding her old friend. She felt relieved when he

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met her with a kindly hand-shake, for which Miss Perkins's manner had not prepared her.

"Well, well, Camilla!" exclaimed Mr. Barnes. "I call it pretty nice of you to look me up."

There had been a thought at the back of the man's mind that the little woman was probably in financial straits and that she had come to him in need; but her appearance seemed to disprove this.

"All right, Miss Perkins," he said with a careless nod to the stiff-necked young woman who lingered with some curiosity concealed beneath her dutiful exterior. She withdrew, closing the door, and Mr. Barnes placed a chair for Camilla by the desk and took his accustomed place.

"You've deserted Brierly, they tell me," he went on, looking into the pleasant face, privately a little amused at the company manners it could assume.

"No, not deserted it, Mr. Barnes."

"Mr. Barnes!" he repeated scornfully. "It did n't use to be 'Mr. Barnes' when I took you on my sled."

Camilla looked around, still with some remnants of awe.

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"These walls," she said, "look as if they would be horrified to hear me call you Jim."

"Do 'em good to get a jolt," returned the host. He shook his head thoughtfully. "Precious few folks to call me Jim nowadays. I have to go back to Brierly for that. You mean Brierly to me, Camilla." They looked at one another; each viewing the change in the other in the last decade.

"Not such a thorny brier as I used to be, I hope," she said, smiling.

"By jingo, is it those silver threads in your hair that are so becoming? You're growing handsome, Camilla. Went to a beauty doctor in New York, I guess. 'Fess up now; I know you did."

"Why, of course," she laughed. "I could n't miss such an opportunity."

"What else did you do? What took you off from home between two days?"

"Oh, I did n't have a home, you know. I was just on sufferance; Mrs. Emerson was very kind and all that; but I was a free lance and I got a call to go, and I fled. You see, we lonely folks, we run around the world sort of wistful, like little stray dogs, longing to belong somewhere and to somebody. Well, I had a chance

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to belong to a baby for a whole year. Her parents had to go away. It was wonderful! but"— Camilla smiled and sighed—"they returned; so back I came."

"Poor youngster!" thought James Barnes. "That sure was heroic treatment for the baby, warranted to kill or cure. Camilla on a tirade! Stand from under."

"You enjoyed it, eh?" he asked aloud. Then, with secret humor: "How's the baby?"

"She's—she's too sweet to talk about," returned the visitor, and her eyes glistened suddenly. "I can't talk about her, Jim. I'm too silly."

"Well, well," thought the grain dealer, watching the April face; "this looks a lot like the taming of the shrew."

"When have you been to Brierly?"

"Nearly a month ago. I had dinner with Cherry and Mr. Shanklin."

"I suppose it made you feel as if you had n't been away at all."

"No," Camilla shook her head. "Nothing can do that. I lived in a nightmare all my life till last April, Jim. A bad dream, full of ugly shapes, poverty, and sickness, and hunger for things I could n't have; and, spreading its

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wings over all like a big bat, was *fear*." Camilla shook her head. "I tell you, Jim, it's wonderful to wake up."

Mr. Barnes regarded the expressive face whose liquid eyes deepened to wells of light as she spoke, and curiosity and interest filled him.

"I'd like to see that baby," he remarked. "It ought to be carried through the streets like that bambino over there in Italy."

"That's enough about me," she returned. "Tell me about yourself."

"I'm the same old humdrum, Camilla. Still scratching gravel to find the grains of wheat."

"I hear you have a beautiful wife."

"Yes, I want to have you meet Mabel if you're going to stay in town. What are you going to do next? Have you a position here?"

"No. I'm after one, to tell the truth. I don't much care to go back to sewing in Brierly. My baby's parents gave me a generous present which gives me time to look around, and I thought perhaps you'd be willing to be my reference if I found something in the city. Cherry says Ellen is away at school."

"Yes. I must tell you. The little minx has turned against her homespun name, and I guess

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she'd been reading Tennyson a good deal. At any rate, she's Elaine now. Why not? There is n't any too much fun in this old world, and if she wants to masquerade as the lily maid of Astolat, let her. Was n't Elaine the lily maid of Astolat, Camilla?"

"I don't know, Jim."

"Well, mine's a lily maid all right, poor little pale thing. If New York will only do as much for her as it has for you, I'll toss up my hat. Send her the address of your beauty doctor, will you, Camilla?"

The visitor, her head dropped to one side, returned his twinkling gaze wistfully.

"Gladly," she said.

"Oh, no, I forgot. It was the baby." The speaker sighed unconsciously. "Elaine is n't very handy with babies."

"How's yours, Jim?" asked Camilla quietly. "Getting to be a big boy, I suppose."

A cloud fell over the host's face. He turned to the desk, and taking down the photograph case handed it to her. "There are my jewels," he said.

"Oh, yes, I can see Ellen's little-girl looks still," said the visitor, "and that's your fine boy. How he looks like Lucy."

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"Yes, he does. He — he — Junior is n't as husky as I'd like to see him."

"He's James Second, is he?" asked Camilla, still with her eyes on the picture and a prayer in her heart. The relaxing of her old friend's face and the change in his eyes when she asked for the baby had not escaped her, looking, as she was, for a sign. "And that lovely lady," she said, nodding her head toward the other photograph.

"Yes, this is Mrs. Barnes." The speaker handed the picture to Camilla, who studied the low, broad forehead, the regular features, and the smoothly braided hair.

"You must meet her, Camilla. You must go home with me to dinner to-night. Why not? I shall be ready to go in fifteen minutes. You have n't any engagement, I hope."

"None."

"Good. I suppose you did n't go up to the farm if you were only a short time in the village."

"No. Cherry told me, though, that it is to be sold. Mr. Metcalf is ill and the doctors are sending them to California. They have n't the money to go and must get it out of the farm."

"So?" James Barnes leaned forward eagerly,

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his hands on his knees. "I've been waiting to be pushed over the brink. I'm crazy for the old place myself. Do you suppose this is my shove, Camilla?"

The visitor smiled. "You'll be shown, Jim. Did you ever think how much life seems to be like that game of magic music we used to play when we were children? We came into the room, just as we come into the world, not knowing what we were meant to do; and some one sits at the piano and plays; the music is soft when you're going in the wrong direction, but increasingly loud and encouraging when you're headed right. We have the great Musician to listen to, Jim."

She caught her lower lip between her teeth and watched him, and he watched her, with the old amused look of surprise and interest.

"What a baby that must have been!" he said at last.

"And if it were the baby," she replied, "is n't it written: 'And a little child shall lead them'?"

CHAPTER V

MADEMOISELLE

VICTOR FORD went straight from his brother-in-law's office to his sister's home. He had a latch-key, and the very fact gave him an added sense of unworthiness as he fitted it into the door. He was still smarting; but the little key seemed at that moment a symbol of all the confidence and kindness shown him in the last nine months by his brother-in-law.

Mabel was seldom at home in the daytime. That he knew; and he wondered suddenly what his errand here was. The vague dissatisfaction with his sister which had been deepening all winter had been bringing him slowly to the point where he felt he must try to formulate her sins of omission and commission, and face her with them; but James Barnes had dashed his worthy intent with a surprising bucket of cold water; and now why was he calling on Mabel at this hour of the day? He certainly was not going to dine at the table of the man who had given him the recent rebuke. It was

Mademoiselle

doubtful if he ever dined there again. Barnes must take his chances with the unsuitable wife he had been determined to possess. Victor reflected with some consolation that he would henceforth be on formal terms only with this household. To be sure! That was what he had come for: to return the latch-key to Mabel.

On entering the dim hall, a woman passing through paused, and turned.

"Oh, it is not Monsieur," she said respectfully. "It is Meester Ford."

"Yes. Is Mrs. Barnes at home?" asked Victor. His tone was in rough contrast to the Frenchwoman's ingratiating manner. He remembered his brother-in-law's comments upon her.

"Yes. I tell Madame. Meester Ford will wait in the salon?"

"No, not if she's dressed. I'll come right up."

"Vair well, Meester Ford. Madame ees in her *atelier*."

Victor took the stairs two at a time and the Frenchwoman looked after him with a little frown before she proceeded on her way to order Junior's supper. "He is handsome. He might be *gentil*; but he is one beast," was her comment.

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Victor knocked at a closed door and, receiving a summons, walked in.

"You, Victor?" exclaimed Mabel. "I thought you had deserted us."

She looked up from the depths of her arm-chair, but did not rise. The ashes of a dead fire lay on the untidy hearth. Shelves of books ran along the sides of the room whose furniture was sparse and expensive. The large table was littered with books; the open desk with papers. Victor's eyes, glancing around the room disapprovingly, came to rest on his sister.

She had evidently just come in, for her hat and coat were on a chair and her hat-pins had pulled her hair awry.

Her brother approached and touched her uplifted face with his lips.

"I don't believe you've consulted the mirror since you came in," he said.

"You can see there is n't one if you look about," she answered, smiling. "Am I such a fright?" She put her hands to her hair and endeavored to pat it into place. "We had such a long session at the club to-day, and being secretary, of course I had to stay to the end. I'm tired to death." But as she made the declaration Mabel met his eyes smilingly. Her

Mademoiselle

brother had longed to see her happy. He knew now that she was so.

"I was just wondering," she went on, "whether I had energy enough to change my dress for dinner. Now your coming has decided the matter. I'll visit with you instead and you'll stay to dinner."

"I would n't dine with you looking that way," he returned, taking the chair nearest her. She looked up, wondering at his ill-temper.

"Many and many a time," she said, "you've dined with me looking a great deal worse. This suit was made by one of the most expensive people in town."

"Times have changed," said Victor. "You owe something to your husband."

"I owe him everything," returned Mabel equably.

"How do you pay?" asked Victor, and his gaze was so accusing that his sister paused a moment, and in the pause there came a blow on the door; it flew open and in rushed a small boy, red in the face with fury.

"I hate her, and I'll kick her," he roared, running to Mabel and giving her a blow on the arm for good measure.

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"Junior, what is the matter!" exclaimed his stepmother, shaking him angrily. The French-woman came in panting with haste.

"Oh, Madame, it is a shame to trouble Madame!"

"Here, here, son," said Victor as he saw his sister in danger from a pair of small patent leather pumps. He seized the child, and held him struggling between his knees while Mabel rubbed her assaulted arm.

"A shame, a shame," went on the French-woman shrilly. "That cook, she is a devil, Madame. She give Junior *pâtisserie* all I can say. I find heem there now, eating — eating. When he have those *migraine* in the night I cannot sleep." The woman's black eyes flashed arrows at the child, who kicked impotently at her, sobbing with rage; and in the midst of the noise and conflict in walked Mr. Barnes and Camilla Lovett.

"What's all this?" asked the master of the house, and Victor loosed the struggling boy, who ran to his father and was clasped, trembling, in his arms.

Mabel rose. "I wish you came in oftener to see what I go through with that child," she said coldly. "Mademoiselle found him eating

Mademoiselle

pastry in the kitchen and because she took him away, this results."

Mabel's eyes were fixed upon the visitor who stood waiting. Her anger was not lessened by this informal ushering of a stranger into their circle at an inopportune moment.

"You must pardon me, dear, for bringing an old friend right upstairs," said her husband. "This is Miss Camilla Lovett from Brierly, and I was so pleased to see her, I brought her home to finish our talk and have some dinner with us. Hush, son." All through this speech Mr. Barnes was patting the frail, panting little figure who still emitted sobs.

"How do you do, Miss Lovett?" The hostess stepped forward and shook hands with the little woman whose face expressed peace in the discordant room.

"I'm sorry to have come in just as your little boy was in trouble," said Camilla.

Junior, hearing the strange voice and being nervous to the verge of hysteria, lifted his head with his eyes shut, and shouted in her direction: "Shut up!"

"It serves James exactly right," thought Mabel, standing straight and helpless in the emergency.

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"*Méchant fils!*!" hissed the Frenchwoman, approaching the father and trying to take the child from his arms.

Junior's strength was exhausted. Mr. Barnes saw that his wife either did not incline or else did not know how to make the situation less embarrassing for the visitor, so he loosed the clinging arms.

"Mademoiselle will bring you to us at dessert," he said to the child.

"That is my good boy," coaxed the Frenchwoman. "We have toast and honey for him. Now, come away." She succeeded in getting possession of her charge and Mabel's brow cleared.

"I'm in disgrace, too, Mademoiselle," she said. "Why didn't you make me dress for dinner? My brother is displeased at my appearance."

"Ah, Monsieur," returned Mademoiselle smoothly, while Junior eyed the quiet little stranger-woman under swollen eyelids. "Madame is all for the brain, all for the brain. She care nossing for her beauty."

Then Junior's little thin legs moved wearily away beside her out into the hall and the door closed behind them.

Mademoiselle

Mabel toyed with a book on the table and half-smiled as if pleased. Victor saw the compression of the husband's lips. He put aside the remembrance of his own stings in the hot impatience he felt with his sister.

"Miss Lovett," he said, approaching with his best manner, "I think Mr. Barnes believes that we have met. I am Mrs. Barnes's brother, Victor Ford. I was in his office when you called this afternoon and left just as you came in. May I take your wrap?"

"Camilla may like to go to your room, Mabel," said Mr. Barnes.

The hostess came out of her trance. "Oh, certainly, Miss — Miss —"

"Lovett," said James Barnes.

"Right in here, Miss Lovett," said Mabel, picking up her own hat and coat.

Her husband held open the door which led to his wife's bedroom.

"I have n't an idea what we're going to have for dinner," said Mabel lightly; "but I have a very reliable woman in my kitchen. She's always sure to treat us sufficiently well."

The door clicked. Victor Ford picked up his own hat and coat and started for the hall. His

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brother-in-law apparently did not comprehend his movement.

"That's no sort of treatment, you can see," he said, pacing the floor.

Victor paused. His heart felt sore; but he endeavored to keep all feeling out of his voice.

"Mabel knows nothing of Miss Lovett, I suppose. She might as well have fallen from the clouds."

"I don't mean that. I mean Junior. He was nervous enough before; but this woman has a bad influence on him. I trust her less and less. I've tried already to get Mabel to dismiss her, but the poor girl has been through so much with helpers —"

"And," said Victor, looking his companion hardly in the face, "we can't always employ a flatterer, you know."

Mr. Barnes met his look, paused a moment, then paced on.

"We all like flattery," he said simply.

"We vary in the amount we can swallow at a gulp. The woman has found Mabel's weakest spot. If she has any beauty, it is certainly nothing to her."

"She leaves that to me," responded the husband.

Mademoiselle

Victor glared at him once more; then with a curt "Good-bye" he turned to the door.

"I'd like you to stay to dinner if you're not engaged," said Mr. Barnes quietly.

Victor paused without turning back.

"I have a hunch," continued his host, "that we're not going to be a very congenial triangle. I wish you'd stay and talk to Mabel and give me a chance at Brierly."

"All right," said Victor briefly, and threw down his burden.

Mabel's good humor continued throughout the dinner. She occasionally gave significant glances of amusement at her brother as her husband indulged in reminiscence with his humble little friend of long ago. James was hopelessly democratic; that she already knew, and she was no climber except mentally. She had learned to listen leniently to tales of Brierly and had frequently promised to visit the scene of her husband's boyhood; but whenever James Barnes saw a loophole of leisure through which he could step for a day, his wife had some engagement too important to be broken.

Mabel found her brother rather subdued, but sufficiently responsive to her accounts of a great

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actress at present interpreting Ibsen plays in the metropolis; and she was deplored his preference for musical comedy when the dessert was brought in.

Simultaneously another door opened and the heir of the house in clean blouse and diminutive velvet trousers entered the dining-room. His somber white face turned at once toward Camilla.

"There now!" exclaimed his father brightly. "This is more like it. Here's my boy. I did n't know that cry-baby upstairs." He held out his arms and Junior approached him slowly, his eyes still gazing, fascinated, at Camilla, who regarded him, smiling. All through the meal her thoughts had turned to the child, and her heart had ached for him. The woman who stood in his mother's place was a marvel to her. Mabel had evidently thrown off the recent scene with an ease which indicated its frequency. She could discuss Ibsen plays with heat, while this little soul took and gave his wounds abovestairs unheeded. As Camilla regarded the child now, the difference from his pictured face in the photograph impressed her.

The music, the magic music of love, which had brought her to the city seemed to swell in

Mademoiselle

her ears as she yearned toward the dull eyes that stared at her.

Junior yielded mechanically as his father lifted him to a seat beside himself. Conversation about the table ceased for the moment.

"That is Miss Camilla Lovett, little boy," said Mr. Barnes.

"I know it," replied Junior, still staring. "Mam'selle says her name's Camel 'cause she's got a hump."

There was a moment of stupefied silence. Then Mr. Barnes moved the child's chair back from the table. "Go upstairs," he said, in tones his son had never heard from him before. Junior was too amazed to cry. He looked with frightened eyes into his father's transformed face and climbed down from the chair.

"Jim! Jim!" said Camilla gently. Her cheeks were very red. "You know quite well it's not the child's fault. His place is here. Let him stay."

"He shall not stay!" exclaimed Mabel, half-pushing her own chair back from the table. "Victor, let James stay with his guest. You carry Junior upstairs for me."

Victor rose from the table, wishing himself a thousand miles away. Three pairs of eyes

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rested on the culprit with such stony accusation that the child stood as if frozen. His legs trembled. His always jolly playmate, Uncle Victor, was scowling at him. His father's face was terrible. His stepmother — but no matter about her. In all the suddenly silent and frowning room, only one face smiled. One pair of eyes beamed upon him. Camilla held out her hands, and the trembling legs moved toward her. She closed her arms about the small figure, and laid her cheek upon his head.

The music within her swelled to divine harmony.

"You did n't know that was going to sound unkind, did you, dear?" she whispered.

She could feel the child shaking and swallowing sobs, and his hands clutched her. "Now will you run upstairs," she went on softly, "and when we're through dinner, may I come up and see your toys? I think they'll let me bring you some ice-cream."

Junior could n't speak; and he had not the hardihood to take another look at his father's face.

For another moment of silence he buried his eyes against Camilla's bosom; then suddenly pulling away, he dashed out of the room.

Mademoiselle

She glanced about the table with a smile whose happiness was evident. She turned to the host. "I was just going to tell you when Junior came in that they have started to build a trolley line through Brierly."

"Has it come?" responded Mr. Barnes with the tone of one who hears of calamity. "Not near Elm Farm?"

"No. It's just a connecting link between the two main lines, and passes by the town hall."

"I remember when that town hall —" began Mr. Barnes, and was again talkative.

Mabel and Victor listened now; everybody was grateful to be off the rocks and launched once more on the safe sea of reminiscence.

CHAPTER VI

IN THE NURSERY

WHEN dinner was over, Camilla made her request to the hostess.

"Ice-cream for our little scamp?" asked Mabel, surprised. "Why, certainly, if you like, Miss Lovett. He deserves something far different."

"Let Camilla do as she pleases," said Mr. Barnes. "She's nutty about babies and Junior seems still young enough to appeal to her."

So Camilla started off with her dish, Victor volunteering to show her the way to the nursery.

Mr. Barnes let him go, for he was fuming within in his haste to get a word with his wife.

As soon as they entered the living-room, still as uncompromisingly cold, stiff, and unattractive as when he had ushered Mabel into it for the first time, he turned to her. His face again fell into the lines which had struck terror to his son's soul.

"Which of us shall dismiss her?" he asked without preamble; "you, or I?"

In the Nursery

"Dismiss whom?" asked Mabel, gazing at him in blank surprise.

"That fool Mam'selle. She's worse than a fool, she's a knave."

"Oh, James," protested Mabel, "that was unfortunate; but, of course, Mademoiselle was only making a little joke, probably to get Junior out of his cross mood. She never dreamed the child would repeat it."

"That mean, coarse spirit shall not stay in my house another day," was the stern response.

"Oh, you misjudge her," returned Mabel earnestly. "Mademoiselle has beautiful manners. She's a treasure. She is such a help to me in my French; and Junior has already learned a number of French words."

"Unfortunately he still speaks English," said Mr. Barnes dryly. "We won't discuss this, Mabel. You may engage as many outside French teachers as you like. This resident goes."

— "But not at once," protested Mabel. "Give me time to look about."

Her husband regarded her strangely. "That insult to my old friend meant nothing to you, then?" he said.

"Why, I — I —" hesitated Mabel under his

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cold gaze—"I was—indeed, it did mean something. Didn't you see how shocked I was?"

"But you'd leave my little boy under that influence still," persisted the other, and his wife grew warm and resentful at the sound of the possessive pronoun. "You don't seem to notice that the child is running down every day."

"No, I don't see anything of the sort. That's nonsense. Junior is quite as well as the average growing child. They don't retain their baby roundness."

"It is n't only that he's losing flesh. It is his expression: unhappy, fretful."

Mabel shrugged her shoulders. "It is n't my fault that he has such a disagreeable disposition. He was like that when I first saw him. You told me when we were married that I should have no trouble with him! No trouble! Every nurse or governess I have engaged has assured me that he is the most impossible child she ever saw. Now we have one who is willing to stay at least and is very advantageous to us, and because the little joke she made to amuse the child was in bad taste, you want to throw me into hot water again, and lose her a good

In the Nursery

position. Who is this Camilla Lovett that she should upset our household arrangements?"

Mr. Barnes's face was grim and on his brow deep lines sank between the eyes.

"She is an old friend," he answered slowly, "with a physical defect. She is insulted in my house —"

"By the unconscious lips of a child," interrupted Mabel.

"A child prompted by a malicious and mischievous woman," went on her husband. "I have felt it from the first. I never trusted her, and she has been given full charge of a little, impressible mind." He paused, and swallowed. "She goes to-night," he finished briefly.

"To-night!" exclaimed Mabel, aghast. "I should think not. You would n't turn her out at night with no warning, I hope."

"That's just what I'd do," replied Mr. Barnes quietly. "That little rack of bones won't be bullied by her another night. I've heard something of the altercations."

Angry tears sprang to Mabel's eyes; but her husband's look was unrelenting and she saw that the last straw had done its traditional work.

"Who will sleep in the nursery, then?" she demanded.

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The steady gaze regarding her glowed a bit.
“You might,” was the quiet reply.

“I can’t do it. Junior is extremely restless and I am very dependent on my sleep; to-night especially because I have to read a paper to-morrow.”

Mr. Barnes surprised his wife very much by laughing softly; and somehow the laugh sent a hot flush down her spine.

“I don’t know you to-night, James,” she went on, her cheeks red. “You’re not a bit like yourself. What’s the matter with you?”

“I guess the only matter is that I’m a father,” he answered. “Let us go upstairs.”

“Don’t send Mademoiselle away to-night,” pleaded Mabel. “It’s a disgrace to her, don’t you see? You should think of her side of it.”

“Very well,” returned Mr. Barnes. “It is something, doubtless, to have strictly impartial judgment.”

Mabel did n’t like the sound of this, either; but she was relieved to get some reprieve, and she followed her husband upstairs, much stirred within, and wishing devoutly that it had not occurred to Camilla Lovett to visit her childhood’s friend.

When they entered the nursery they found

In the Nursery

Junior in bed propped up by pillows and luxuriously feeding himself with ice-cream from the plate which Camilla still held as she half-reclined beside him, on the edge of the second little white enamel bed.

Victor Ford was sitting at ease in a wicker armchair, and Mademoiselle was folding Junior's clothes and arranging matters on the dresser, constantly flashing glances toward the bed.

As Mr. and Mrs. Barnes entered the room, she approached.

"*Pardon, Madame,*" she said, with lifted chin, "but will Madame say to the lady to give no more ice! It is I who must endure the night."

"Not to-night," declared Mr. Barnes, fixing the speaker so suddenly with his eyes that she stood with parted lips. "Go ahead, Camilla," he continued. "Ice-cream won't hurt him a bit. He looks as if he needed about a quart. Is it good, little chap?"

Junior poised his spoon in air at his father's voice and looked at him big-eyed. Satisfied that he was again in favor, he nodded, and proceeded with his feast.

Camilla looked questioningly at Mrs. Barnes, and started to leave her perch.

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"Stay where you are, Camilla," commanded the host. There seemed to him a new warmth and light in the room, and again came a stricture at his heart at the smallness of the throat down which the cream was swallowed, and the thinness of the little hand which already was becoming tired. Junior dropped the spoon and lay back on his pillow.

Camilla rose with the intent to hand the saucer, still half full, to the child's nurse; but Mademoiselle did not see it. She picked up a garment already folded and shaking it out re-folded it. Her domain had been invaded without a by-your-leave, and the master of the house, a figurehead in her estimation, had overridden her wishes. At his next words she pricked up her ears and the little blouse she held dangled by one sleeve.

"Who do you think is going to sleep in your other bed to-night?" asked the father, standing at his boy's feet and noting the circles around his eyes.

"Mam'selle," replied the child stolidly.

"Not a bit of it," was the blithe answer.

"Who?" asked the boy. Then he pointed at the visitor. "Her?"

Mr. Barnes shook his head. "No, old man.

In the Nursery

You aren't a good guesser. Your Daddy's going to sleep there."

The child sat straight up. "You, Daddy?" he asked incredulously. "Are you going to sleep in my other bed?" he sighed unconsciously. "There's been such a lot of folks there."

The father swallowed again. "I know, son," he said quietly, "but I'm going to be the one to-night."

Junior still found difficulty in discovering a reason for this unprecedented windfall; and having become a misanthrope, a dark cause occurred to him.

"Is it because I was a bad boy?" he asked solemnly.

"No." Mr. Barnes shook his head. "It's because — just because I want to."

The melancholy eyes questioning him were reassured by his expression.

"Hurray!" cried the child, sinking back on his pillow. "I don't care if the *bêtes* do come, then. I guess my Daddy can shoot 'em"; and the speaker cast a look of defiance at Mademoiselle.

"Sh', *mon cher*," she said soothingly. "You know your Mam'selle let nossing 'urt her leetle one." As she spoke, the black eyes glanced rapidly from one to another in the room.

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"What do you mean by the 'bait,' Junior?" asked his father, still speaking quietly.

"Oh, there's bears — and — tigers and they have" — he shuddered — "yellow eyes, and if I wake Mam'selle up in the night, they'll creep out from behind that screen over there"; and the child pointed at a tall folding screen that stood in a corner of the room.

Mrs. Barnes sent a troubled look at the Frenchwoman, who uttered a little uncomfortable laugh. "La, la," she said, "it is leetle game I play with *mon cher*. Fie, fie, leetle one!"

"And Mam'selle won't let the light burn 'cause it hurts her eyes, and sometimes I hear them roar deep, deep down, 'cause they don't want me to hear 'em." Another shudder quivered through the little frame.

"I'll be here to-night," returned the father simply, and the child stretched out a hot hand. James Barnes leaned over the bed where Camilla had perched a few minutes ago and caressed the little hand.

"I'll be back in a few minutes, Junior," he said; then he turned toward the Frenchwoman.

"I want to see you a minute, Mam'selle, in Mrs. Barnes's study."

"*Pardon, Monsieur,*" she replied, her head

In the Nursery

erect, "I must first ask all to leave the room, that my leetle one may become quiet. He grow vair nervous."

Mr. Barnes's teeth set; but he simply made an imperious gesture. "At once, if you please," he said sternly.

The Frenchwoman shrugged her shoulders, and cast a smiling glance at her mistress as she passed. She felt secure, and quite able to dominate the situation in spite of the child's chatter. Her master was going to sleep beside him! What sudden ebullition of parental affection was this? Of one thing she was certain. One night beside the little bundle of nerves would quite suffice the gentleman.

With her head up and following her employer she stepped jauntily across the threshold, little dreaming that *Vale* was written thereon.

An embarrassing silence fell for a moment in the nursery. To Junior wonderful things were occurring. There was the lady, not as tall as sister, but with a grown-up face, whose bosom had felt so kind and soft when everybody was cross at the table, even Daddy, and who had seemed to like to hold the ice-cream for him; and then Uncle Victor, and Mamabel, all up in the nursery when he was in bed, and Daddy

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promising to sleep with him; — all these out-of-the-ordinary proceedings made the small boy feel very wide awake, and his owl-eyes met Victor's, still searching for an explanation.

"Well, I must be wending my way," said that young man, rising. "I wonder if I could be of service in taking you home, Miss Lovett?"

"Where do you live?" asked Junior, suddenly transferring his questioning eyes to Camilla.

She approached the bed again. "I don't live anywhere — exactly — Junior," she said, and her eyes and voice were wistful. "I'm like a bird, flying around and wondering where I shall light."

"Birds always know where to light," said the little boy.

"Yes," she nodded, "and I shall know pretty soon."

Mabel, her heart beating with dread of what was going on in her study, stepped forward. "Would you mind, Miss Lovett, waiting here a few minutes? There is some business I want to speak of to my brother, and Mr. Barnes would n't like it at all if I let you go before he came back."

"Certainly, I'll wait with pleasure," replied Camilla.

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Victor waved a good-night to Junior, and Mabel stood for a moment at the foot of his bed.

"Can you catch a kiss if Mamabel throws it?" she asked, kissing her hand and tossing it in the air.

The child closed and unclosed his fingers listlessly, his face unchanging, and brother and sister disappeared. As they emerged into the hall a strident voice came faintly down the passage.

"Just what I expected," said Mabel. "I knew she'd take it hard." She fled downstairs. Victor followed.

"What do you think!" she exclaimed when they reached the hall, "James is discharging Mademoiselle."

"Are n't you glad to be saved the trouble?"

"But, Victor, her accent is wonderful. I could have talked to her about those mistakes she has made with Junior. I know they're atrocious," she added, as she noted the expression of her brother's face; "but as a governess she's most desirable, I assure you. She had good references."

"And you'll give her another, I suppose?"

"Oh, for pity's sake don't look at me that

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way. I'm so wrought up already I can't bear anything more. I have to read a paper tomorrow and James thinks it would be nothing for me to stay awake all night to-night with Junior. The child talks in his sleep and cries out and kicks. Poor Mademoiselle goes through everything. She has often told me about it."

Victor shook his head. "I told you, you remember,— I told you you were getting into the wrong box."

"James understood," returned Mabel, twining her hands together in her defiant excitement. "I was to have nothing to do with the problem of his children."

"And you're willing to have it that way," returned Victor, his eyes narrowing. "You call that partnership."

"I've done all I ever promised to do." Mabel's voice caught in her throat, but her look still gleamed defiance. "I've done more; for I've been bothered to death with women who could n't manage Junior."

"You won't be bothered much longer," returned Victor quietly.

"That's all you know," retorted his sister. "James is discharging Mademoiselle this min-

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ute and I shall have to go at it again to-morrow with all the important work I'm booked for at the club."

"Cheer up," said Victor bitterly. "It looks as if the next incumbent would succeed in finishing up the business."

"What do you mean?"

"Junior's about done for in my estimation."

"You say that to frighten me," exclaimed Mabel, remembering uncomfortably her husband's similar suggestion. "I believe my arm is black and blue this minute. That outburst looked like weakness, did n't it?"

Victor regarded her, unmoved by the sarcasm.

"I'll tell you what, Mabel," he said quietly, "I'm nothing to boast of myself; but I have some glimmering of what's sportsman-like; and don't be surprised if you don't see me around here much hereafter. I can't stand it."

Mabel, waiting there with him at the foot of the stairs, considered herself a most abused woman. She felt suddenly alone, in a cold and inimical world. She forced back her tears. "You were out of sorts when you came here this afternoon," she returned, "and you are still venting your mood on me. Do just as you

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please about coming. Each of us knows his own business best."

Mabel cast a glance up the staircase. She shrank from the inevitable scene with Mademoiselle, and wondered if there was a man on earth who had any understanding sympathy with a woman!

CHAPTER VII

THE BIRD WITHOUT A NEST

LEFT alone with Junior, Camilla sat down on the foot of the second bed and faced the boy, who regarded her appraisingly. Her hair, parted in the middle and waving away from her forehead, and the small white teeth that showed in her ready smile were pleasant to look upon; but the steady beaming of her kind eyes was what he liked best. Eyes in his experience when they saw him at all — all except Daddy's — saw him to blame; but his somber face now showed no sign.

"I'm glad they let me have a visit with you alone," said Camilla. "I thought I'd like to tell you about the little baby I took care of in New York. I love her so much."

The small boy, all eyes, looking up from the pillow, experienced a strange sensation. It was an unpleasant sensation. He had felt it sometimes before when Daddy sent him to bed and remained belowstairs laughing and talking with Mamabel.

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"I don't like babies," he announced with finality.

"But you would this one. She has little hands — oh, not nearly as big as yours — and just a few teeth — not a whole set like yours, and cunning little pink ears, and her brown hair curls around them in rings, and her eyes —"

"I don't like her, though," interrupted Junior, hardening his heart against Camilla's gentle voice that sounded so sweet after Mademoiselle's sharpness. "Why don't you go back and see her?" he added coldly.

Camilla lifted her shoulders and eyebrows and smiled. "Her daddy and her mother came home, and she does n't need me any more. I wanted you to understand why it made me happy to get a little boy in my arms to-night. My arms felt so queer and empty."

Junior considered this a moment, and in spite of himself warmed his heart at Camilla's eyes. "But I'm not a baby," he said quickly: "I'm nearly seven."

"Yes, I know."

"Besides, your baby sounds like a doll." Pause. "I used to have a doll; her name was Miss Rosalind; but boys when they're six don't care about dolls." He spoke slowly and with

The Bird without a Nest

consideration. His visitor, listening for the Magic Music, with every perception sharpened, thought she detected a wistfulness.

"I hope your doll is n't thrown away, Junior. I should like to see it some time. Is it a girl doll?"

"Ye—es." The boy spoke with elaborate scorn. "Anybody'd laugh at anybody who'd care for that. I've got soldiers, and a cannon."

"I would n't care if they did laugh at me, Junior." Camilla spoke confidentially. "I like dolls still. I could have fun playing with them. Does that sound queer to you? You may laugh at me."

"I'd laugh if I wanted to," replied the child; but his parted lips looked as if they had forgotten how.

"To-day I stopped in front of the toy-shop windows, and looked at some of the big beautiful dolls, trying to find one that looked like my baby."

"She is n't yours," declared the little boy roughly. "You just said so." He frowned, and the music softened into a minor strain.

"No, no, she is n't," agreed Camilla; "but I was just telling you so you'd know how happy it made me to come here and find a live little

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boy that I could talk to and who would understand; because—were n't you ever homesick, Junior?"

"I don't know what that means."

"It means longing for some one you can love, and do things for, and help."

"There is n't anybody that I like but Daddy."

"And I have n't any daddy, you see," said Camilla, speaking brightly, "nor any mother, nor any brother, nor any sister, nor any house, and so, don't you see, when I had to come so far away from the baby, how nice it was that you could be such a comfort to me?"

This was a psychological poser for Junior. A few minutes a day with an affectionate but tired and usually abstracted daddy was the only exception in his mind to the rule that every man's hand was against him.

"Am I a comfort to you?" he asked at last, and never had the slender white face looked more somber.

"A very great comfort," replied Camilla seriously; "and some time," she added, "if you think you could find the doll you used to have when you were small, I'd like to see it. I was really tempted to buy one to-day."

"The devil tempts people," announced

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Junior. "He's got a fork in his tail. Why does n't he have a knife, too?" The question came with a gleam of interest.

"I don't think it was the devil that tempted me. I think it was Love; but Love had something better for me." Camilla smiled across the little white bed. "It had *you!*"

"Do you like me?" Junior's tentative tone was rather shamefaced. He could not resist reaching antennæ toward the warmth, and he looked full at the beaming eyes.

"I like you more than I can say," was the prompt reply.

"Where do you live?"

"Don't you remember I told you, nowhere? Pretty soon when your Daddy comes I shall fly away like a bird and light somewhere — I guess in a hotel."

"What's that?"

"A place where they let birds light who have n't any nests of their own."

Junior regarded her for a silent pause. "You talk kind of silly," he said judicially.

Camilla laughed. "Perhaps I do," she answered.

"Do you wish you did n't have to fly out of my house?" he asked after another pause.

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"I try not to wish, Junior," she said.

The child's gaze fastened more intently upon her. A thought had suddenly begun to work in his mind.

"When are you coming back to this house again?" he asked.

"I don't know, dear," she answered.

Junior scanned the wavy hair, the smooth forehead, the gentle smile, and warm eyes, and a vague dread of the old house possessed him, as it would be to-morrow alone with Mam'selle.

Daddy would go away to-morrow. There was no hope of retaining that bird in the bush. This one as yet was in the hand. He considered the possibilities.

His next words were as earnest as his gaze.

"Do you wish you could sleep in my other bed, Camel, instead of Daddy?" he asked slowly.

Loud and inspiring were the harmonies in which Camilla moved closer to the child and took a willing hand.

"Yes, little darling," she said, "I do wish it."

At that moment a crashing noise was heard from the other side of the wall.

"That's Mam'selle's room," said Junior softly. "She makes that noise when she's awful mad."

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His fingers tightened on Camilla's, and the noises, little and big, continued, until a bang as of a trunk lid descending seemed to be the climax.

Camilla closed her eyes and Junior dilated his. There were a few more rustlings, a door slammed, then silence. Camilla rested her head against the edge of the child's pillow and drew his hand against her cheek. He snuggled closer to her with a delicious sense of safety.

Downstairs Mabel had drawn Victor into the living-room and lighted the gas-logs. She was shivering, and as the noises in the house increased, she felt glad of the firm strength above-stairs which was saving her from handling the firebrand. By morning Mademoiselle's wrath would have spent itself.

Not that Mabel intended to show any gratitude. She was still injured, miserable, and terribly bored by the necessity of replacing Mademoiselle. At last she heard a motor draw up before the house, and her husband's voice speaking. There was a rush on the stairs, an opening and closing of the front door. Then in a minute or two the noise of the motor starting, a reopening and closing of the house door, and Mr. Barnes pulled aside the velvet portières.

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"Ah, here you are," he said. "Well, that job's done."

"Do you mean to say she's gone?" exclaimed Mabel, amazed.

"Gone — vanished." James Barnes looked a little weary.

"But you promised me —" began Mabel, drawing herself up very straight.

"Yes, I gave her her choice; and a little extra money, a hotel and a taxi prevailed. Ugh! I can breathe better!"

Mabel looked rueful. "It's all very well for *you* —" she began.

"My dear, that was a dangerous person," said James Barnes in a different tone. "I'm not imaginative as you have often complained quite justly; but the reason you have not lost a lot of jewels is because you don't care for them and I've never given you any." He nodded. "She was half ready to go. This was no field for her talents. She made one false move, though. She forgot to ask for a reference. When she wants one she'll write it herself and it will come from across the pond. Were n't the ones she showed you foreign?"

"Yes, because she had only been here —" Mabel stopped under her husband's smile.

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"Yes, I know," he answered.

"Well, I'm going to try to get a German next," said Mabel. "Junior must have the advantage of a language and Germans are more phlegmatic and dependable."

"I'll interview the next one myself, my dear," said James Barnes kindly.

"Find her, too, then," retorted Mabel. "Telephone an advertisement to-night, James. Think what a situation we'll be in."

Victor Ford stood up abruptly. "I have been waiting to take Miss Lovett home," he said.

James Barnes recollected with a start that Camilla was still in the house.

"Very good of you, Victor," he declared, and looked at his wife. The stress in her tightened lips changed his desire to have her seek his guest. He did not wish Camilla to carry away any further disagreeable impressions.

"Phone for the car, will you, Victor?" he said. "I'll go up and get Miss Lovett."

Ascending the stairs, he hurried to the nursery door, apologetic that the visitor had been left to herself so long; but he paused on the threshold at the signal of Camilla's raised finger. He gazed at the surprising tableau before him.

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The guest was reclining with her head toward Junior, who had fallen asleep with one hand in hers and his other arm tightly around her neck.

Uncomfortable as she must have been she was evidently loath to be freed from the stranglehold; but James Barnes's step had been heavy and the door had squeaked. Junior waked and turned.

The guest sat up and tucked away her disarranged hair.

"Do excuse us, Camilla," said the host, approaching. "You fell on stirring times in my house. I'm sorry."

"I'm glad," she returned. "It had to be uncovered, you know."

"What's that?" inquired James Barnes.

"Why — we can't get rid of wrong until it's uncovered to us, can we?"

Mr. Barnes smiled at the quaint wording. "That's so. Blows in the dark are hard to fend off. Well, I've got rid of one wrong thing. You may have heard some slamming around here."

"It was Mam'selle," announced Junior sleepily.

"Yes, she's gone, son." And James Barnes looked compassionately at the child.

"Will she come back to-morrow?" asked

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Junior, the idea appearing to lift his heavy eyelids.

"No, nor the day after that, nor ever."

The boy gave his pillow a thump. "I'm glad," he said.

His father spoke again. "Why did n't you tell me you wanted her to go away, Junior?"

The child reflected. He had not the vocabulary to explain that he had come to accept the general view that he was a necessary evil and that it did n't matter so very much which of the persons hired to wash and dress him was the antagonist in his daily duels.

"I — she —" he began; then finished: "She'd slap me if I did."

His father gave an inarticulate exclamation.

"Well, go to sleep now," he said. "Uncle Victor is going to take Miss Lovett home and I'll be back here before you can say 'Jack Robinson.'"

"Oh, no, Daddy," exclaimed the child, now very wide awake. "Miss Lovie has n't any home to go to. She's a bird, flying around without any nest. Uncle Victor would have to go around the streets — and around — and around — and around" — the little hand made vague circles in the air — "and so —" Junior came

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back from watching his hand in his flight of fancy, to the practical; "and so she's going to sleep in my other bed, Daddy. You won't care, will you, 'cause she has n't got any nest."

Camilla sat on the edge of the bed watching her host's surprise. He caught her smiling gaze.

"Why, that's extremely good of Miss Lovett," he replied; "but she does n't know what an active little fellow you have become in the night season. She'd probably like to get a snooze in somewhere. If you will stay, Camilla," he went on, addressing the guest, "my wife and I will be delighted. We've a guest-room just waiting for you."

"No, no," exclaimed Junior, sitting up in bed and scowling. "I want her to sleep here."

"How about your poor old Daddy?" inquired Mr. Barnes, as amused as he was astonished.

"*You'll* go away to-morrow. She'd stay," replied Junior.

His father laughed. "Wise beyond your years, young man. Camilla, you've made a crush," he went on, "but such heroic measures won't be necessary."

Junior began to scowl and beat the air with his fists. "Wait, wait, boy," said his father. "Miss Lovett can have a good night in the

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guest-room, and then, perhaps, she will stay a while to-morrow morning and visit you."

Camilla reached one of the little belligerent fists and held it.

"Junior is right," she said, "in thinking I'd like this nest best."

The other fist became quiet.

"But from what I hear, the child's a circus in the night," protested the host.

"Do you wonder," asked Camilla, regarding him gravely, "after some of the things we have listened to?" Then after a little pause: "I wish you'd let me, Jim, unless Mrs. Barnes objects."

"Why," returned the amazed father, "she'll be very grateful, of course; but it's a rather odd way to treat a visitor. I had it all fixed to improve my mind all night."

"No, go to bed and sleep, Jim, and know that you've made me happy."

"We'll see about that at breakfast-time," laughed the host skeptically; "but be it on your own head, Camilla. I'll go down and send Mrs. Barnes to fix you up for your vigil."

James Barnes's face wore an unconscious smile as he descended the stairs and reentered the room where Victor and Mabel waited. They both looked up, surprised that he was alone.

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"See anything queer about my nose?" he asked.

"Where is Miss Lovett?" asked Mabel.

"I tell you my nose is out of joint. Junior won't let Camilla go. She's going to be the sacrifice instead of me."

"What do you mean? Sleep with him?" asked Mabel in extreme surprise.

"Just that."

"But, James, how can we let her—a stranger; and yet, if she's willing—I know how much you need your mind clear and I have been worrying about your being kept awake. Perhaps Miss Lovett has nothing special to do to-morrow and she seems so fond of children."

It was at that moment that the Magic Music began to sound with a fuller volume of harmony. Perhaps Camilla's inner ear took cognizance of it as she moved about the nursery, followed by the child's big eyes, her prayer ascending like a pure flame from the altar of her heart.

"Look here, Mabel," said James Barnes suddenly, his face eagerly alight, "I've just had an idea. Camilla's in town looking for a job. What's the matter with our engaging her?"

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"For a governess? Oh, no. An ignorant little countrywoman like that? Of course, she's all right. I don't mean to say anything against an old friend of yours; but she hasn't had advantages. We want to do better for Junior than that."

"Yes," returned her husband. "We must get somebody if we can who will slap him and bully him in seven different languages; some one who knows how to take care of her precious self and protect her sleep at night. Let's put in the ad at once."

"James, don't be so foolish," pleaded his wife, the enormity of the possibility making her gentle and cautious. "Do you realize what we should be letting ourselves in for? You can't put an old friend at the servants' table, can you? And don't you think it's depressing to have some one about all the time who is de—who is n't quite shapely, you know?"

James Barnes began to pace the floor and Victor Ford looked out the window for the car.

"Men don't think about these things," added Mabel pacifically.

Her husband stopped and faced her.

"I can't speak for all men," he said, "but I know the sort of thing that appeals to a father

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more than degrees and foreign languages. It's what I saw when I went upstairs. Junior was asleep with his arms around Camilla's neck." Something rose in the speaker's throat; but he knew he had a fight to make, a fight he must win, and he swallowed and pushed on. "I guess it's the first time that the baby has ever gone to sleep with his arms around a woman's neck."

Silence for a moment while Victor doggedly scanned the road, and Mabel bit her lip.

Her husband saw her flush.

"I'll make it easy for you in any way you like, dear," he went on. "You don't care much where headquarters are. Camilla's a babyless mother. If she'll stay, let the boy come into his heritage. Then if embarrassment occurs in any way, I'll take a suite in the finest hotel in town and we'll go there and entertain or do anything you please."

"There's the car," said Victor, suddenly reappearing from behind the curtains where James Barnes in his earnestness had forgotten his existence.

"Oh, yes," answered the host.

"I'll go and tell Dick to take it back. Good-night." Victor was striding hastily to the door.

"No, let him take you home first," said

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Mr. Barnes. "Good-night." He turned back to his wife. "Is it a bargain, Mabel?" he asked.

She was knotting her hands together, and quivering as under blows, but she hardened her heart.

"I suppose so," she answered coldly.

"That's right, dear." Her husband patted her shoulder. "Now, you go upstairs and give Camilla one of your nice white ruffly things, and then we'll go to bed and sleep, and in the morning feel her pulse after she's had a sample."

"I don't know how much I shall sleep," returned Mabel. "I have a headache."

"Well, you'd have had a worse one if you had gone through the tussle with Mam'selle. Credit me with one good mark, anyway, dear."

"Oh, the good marks are all yours, of course," returned his wife, her eyes very dark. "Mine are this kind." She lifted her arm where was a bruise. "Here is one Junior gave me to-day. He had a piece of metal in his hand."

James Barnes took the round arm in both hands and tried to kiss the black-and-blue spot; but she snatched it away and hurried from the room.

CHAPTER VIII

THE BÊTES

MABEL's heart beat fast as she went upstairs. She was very angry with her husband, not so much for what he had said as that Victor had heard him say it. In the old days she had been the strong, steadfast pivot on which the household turned. At the time of her marriage she had been a heroine in her own, and in a modified fashion in her brother's, eyes.

Through no fault of hers she had been rudely thrust down from a pedestal. This morning — nay, a few hours ago — she had been happy. Constantly assured that she was invaluable in the splendid work being done at her clubs, secure in the triumph that awaited her tomorrow in the reading of her paper, which she secretly believed was the best of the season, all these tiresome, distasteful household matters had come up to harass her.

Of course, an inconsistent jealousy of Camilla was present. The latter's willingness to take charge of Junior threw her own reluctance into

The Bêtes

the light, and it was with no friendly feeling that she entered the nursery now.

Camilla approached her. "Is n't this a great surprise, Mrs. Barnes," she said softly, "for Junior to invite me to stay with him?"

"Yes," returned Mabel stiffly. "I am sorry you are doomed to be so uncomfortable; but with Junior's father an invitation from the child is equivalent to one from royalty: a command."

"It will be a pleasure to me," replied Camilla humbly.

Mabel continued as if she had not heard her. "I should sleep with him myself, of course, in his nurse's sudden departure, except that I have some important outside work to do tomorrow and need my rest."

"I don't want you," announced Junior from the bed in no uncertain tones.

"It would n't matter what you wanted," returned Mabel, very much irritated, but speaking with dignity. "I should do what was best." She dreaded further revelations from the bed, and hastened on. "I will go and bring you what you need for the night, Miss Lovett."

"Let me go with you and bring my wraps away from your room. I may be off in the

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morning while you're still busy," said Camilla; and suiting the action to the word she followed her hostess out of the room. No kisses were thrown this time from Mamabel's pretty hand.

By the time Camilla returned, burdened, to the nursery, she understood pretty well the soreness at Mabel's heart. Her hostess had assured her that breakfast was a movable feast with them and that the visitor was at liberty to have hers at any moment she pleased and be free to leave the house quite informally. Camilla found James Barnes bidding his son good-night.

He turned to her as she placed the clothing on a chintz divan.

"I hope you'll be just as good friends with us in the morning as you are now," he said. "I'll see you then, Camilla, and find out how you liked the sample."

She looked at him serenely. "I know already, Jim," she answered, noting his last word hopefully, and even waiting a moment for something further. He shook hands with her and said good-night, and her peaceful, happy face seemed to lighten some long-carried load on his heart.

When the door closed, Junior spoke:—

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"What did you call my Daddy?" he asked.

Camilla laughed a little. "I guess that sounded funny to you, Junior; but when I was as little as you are, your Daddy was a big, big, boy, and all the boys and girls in school called him 'Jim.' He was pretty kind to a little girl. Sometimes he took me on his sled. I didn't have any; and once he drove away a big dog that was playing about and knocked me down. I never forgot that. We always do remember when people are kind to us, don't we?"

Junior did n't reply to this. He was picturing his father a big boy with a sled, and watching Camilla's every movement with owl-eyes.

"Now," she went on, "I'm going into the bathroom a few minutes to undress. Shall I turn down the light a little so you can go to sleep?"

"No!" exclaimed the child in a loud, rude voice.

"All right," replied Camilla quietly. She moved to the large paneled screen in the corner of the room and looked behind it. "Oh, how lovely!" she said. "Such a lot of toys. What a beauty rocking-horse; and there's a train of cars and so many things you'll show me in the morning. We don't need to cover them up at

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night, do we? Let's have all the more air in the room."

As she spoke Camilla folded the screen and leaned it against the side of the chimney, Junior watching her in silence.

She walked over to him with a smile and turned down the cover of her bed. "It's getting pretty late for a little boy," she said. "You need n't stay awake for politeness. I shall come and get into this pretty white nest in a few minutes."

"You need n't shut the door tight," returned Junior.

"All right," said Camilla, and taking up her night - clothes, she opened the door into the bathroom and disappeared, careful not to latch it behind her as she pushed it to.

Left alone, Junior gloomily regarded the unprecedented exposure of his toys in the corner. The fire burning very low sputtered and cracked a little. His horse's jaunty and proudly curved neck stood up bravely in the electric-lighted room. Junior's eyelids felt heavy, but he jerked them open. His new friend had gone into the bathroom — yes. Moreover, he knew there was no door out of it save the one he was looking at; but neither Daddy nor Mamabel believed that he would be a quiet boy in the night. The

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visitor had said she would come and get into his other bed; but in his experience grown-up people said a great many things, and he had found that seeing is believing. What more easy, if his new friend found him asleep, than to put out the lights, and slip through the door to another room where there was no *méchant petit* to kick and make a noise.

So, by rigid effort, the owl-eyes were wide when Camilla came out of the bathroom.

Mademoiselle always put her black hair up in crimping-pins at night and this small forest of horns was imprisoned under a broad red ribbon, tied in a bow on top of the lady's head. Junior hated this ribbon, connected somehow with his nocturnal fears; perhaps because Mademoiselle was more severe by night than by day, and the rampant bow was the first thing he saw when a heavy hand shook him out of his nightmares.

Now the figure that opened the bathroom door and coming out closed it behind her looked more like a little girl than ever. Her night-dress trailed on the floor, and her pale pink kimono hung in pretty folds. Her wavy hair, parted and brushed smoothly, hung in two short braids ending in curls.

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"Still awake?" she said pleasantly, her fresh sweet face smiling; then as the spirited horse pranced as she passed him to put out the lights she patted his head. "Good-night, horsie," she said, and snapped off the electricity. A single light still burned at the head of the beds.

"Is that the light you used to want Mam'selle to leave burning?" she asked, standing by her bed.

"Yes," replied Junior. He had fought for it with each new nurse. This visitor looked easy to command.

Camilla smiled at him. "Who ever heard of a bird's nest under a bright light?" she said. "Let's start with it out, and whenever you ask me to light it, I will."

This seeming fairenough, silence gave consent.

"Lock the door," said Junior imperiously.

"Oh, did Mademoiselle lock the door?" Camilla obediently trailed to the door.

"Bring me the key," pursued the child.

"Why, Junior," his new friend laughed. "What do you want the key for?"

"You mean to go away in the morning before I'm awake," declared Junior, with the air of a bird who is too old to be caught with chaff.

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"Certainly not," returned Camilla. "I promise you that we'll have breakfast together."

"Mam'selle promised me things," said the child.

"Well, my promises are made of such tough stuff they can't break." The speaker's eyes convinced the small skeptic before her even more than her words.

He watched silently while she opened the windows and put out the remaining light. The crucial moment for Junior in the twenty-four hours came when that last inexorable snap took place. The seal of silence fell on the mysterious room, broken only by the snoring of Mademoiselle.

The dying fire still shed a dim glow to-night and in it he could see the outline of his companion as she slipped off the kimono, hung it over a chair and got into her bed. The habitual dread of going to sleep fell over Junior, and the habitual conviction that it would be a sin to speak after a grown-up had settled to rest. It was with surprise, then, that he heard Camilla say with a pleasant, sleepy sigh: "Such a dear, soft little nest. This bird is very happy."

Happy! In the dark! In this room! A won-

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derful sense of license came over Junior. It certainly made the circumstances less awful to speak aloud, voluntarily.

"Is the bird happy?" he asked.

"Very," replied Camilla. "Have you said your prayers, yet?"

"No. Mam'selle said prayers for me. She asked the *bon Dieu* to make me a good boy and keep me still."

Camilla felt moisture creep slowly on her lashes.

"It protects us from being frightened and having bad dreams to say happy prayers," she said after a minute.

"I don't know any," replied the child. "Is it verses?"

"Sometimes; but it's things you can make up yourself. You never have to wonder what to say to Daddy, do you?"

"No; but Daddy's so busy."

Camilla swallowed. "Yes, I suppose so; but this wonderful God we pray to, He's never too busy."

"I know it," said Junior. "He sees me when I'm bad. I don't care if He does. He can't do anything."

"Only good things — only loving things,"

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returned Camilla quietly. "He is your Daddy's Father—"

"Is He my grandpa, then? I saw his picture. He's awful homely."

Camilla turned her face into the pillow for a brief space and it shook.

"No, this is different," she said at last. "God is the Father of everybody—of your father, and you, and me, and Mamabel, and your sister—and everybody; and He loves us all so dearly that it's easy to ask Him for everything that's right."

"Then could I ask Him to take away the *bêtes*?"

"Yes, indeed. What do you think I asked Him yesterday?" Camilla spoke softly. "I asked Him to let me come to this city and if there was a little boy here who needed me, I asked God to help me to find him. I did n't have the baby any longer, you see, and it seemed as if an empty place in my heart was aching."

Junior felt a warmth creep up into his cheeks in the darkness. Camilla put her hand outside the counterpane near him. He felt her movement and slipped a very small, very hot hand into hers. She held it closely.

"God loves us so dearly," she said again,

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"that we may call Him mother, too. Father-Mother God. Now, let's just know how much we love Him and go to sleep."

"I'm going to ask Him something first," said the child. "Will He hear me?"

"Indeed, He will."

Upon which Junior, straightening back on his pillow, shouted loudly:—

"God, I want Camel not to go away tomorrow, nor the next day, nor the next day,—nor the next — nor the — nor —"

The small body relaxed as the voice grew fainter and the pauses longer, and with the last word sleep overcame the petitioner.

Camilla arranged the covers over him, and sank back upon her pillow. The fire flickered out. The spring breeze stirred the curtains, bringing the occasional whir of motors; but the street was not a thoroughfare and the city noises were subdued. Camilla smiled in the darkness. Surely the Magic Music was increasing.

She had no idea how long she had been asleep when a cry of fear, and then sobs and choking from the other bed awakened her. Junior was thrashing about, half-awake and crying.

"I don't care, Mam'selle, I don't care," he screamed angrily.

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Camilla put her hand on him. He knew the heavy hand and the shaking he would get and how the wild ends of her red ribbon would rear up, and he fought her off.

"I won't, I won't!" he cried.

"Wake up, dear. It's Camilla," she said, and the gentle, loving voice penetrated.

"I heard 'em; I heard 'em," he cried again, shaking, but remembering at last who was with him and clutching his companion's neck as she leaned over him.

"Shall I turn on the light?" she asked.

"Yes, oh, yes!" exclaimed the child, with excited relief.

Camilla turned the switch, then slipped into her bed again, and, with a smile toward which the terrified child turned as the flower turns toward the sun, held out her arms and the boy crept into them, trembling, basking in her kindness.

"See your pony over there," she said, crooningly, "and all your nice toys. See how much love Daddy and everybody had to get you so many lovely things. This room is full of love, Junior, full, full of love. Nothing else can get in. What a pretty room. What a happy little boy I have in my arms."

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Junior pulled himself up and looked all around the room incredulously; then back into the deep kindness of Camilla's eyes.

"Did you think you heard lions and tigers?" she asked, as he sank back. "How could you, when they are thousands and thousands of miles away in their own woods where they're so happy with their own little babies; snuggling up close to them and licking them very softly with their tongues. They don't even know there's a boy away off in this country thinking about them. Would n't they be surprised?"

"Would they?" asked Junior hoarsely, his tears drying on his cheeks.

"I guess they would! They'd say, 'Does that boy think we'd leave our little babies alone and go and visit him? Well, I guess not!'"

Junior's eyes entreated her for reassurance and she smiled at him and gave him a little squeeze. "Ridiculous, is n't it?" she asked, and the child gurgled a hoarse agreement.

"Now, shall we put out the light and go to the land of Nod again?"

"Where's that?" asked Junior suspiciously.

"Where the sand-man lives; the kind little sand-man who makes boys' eyelids fall down

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so they can drop into the land of Nod and pick flowers there."

"I hate to go to sleep, Camel," confessed the child piteously.

"But that will all be changed when you remember that this room is full of love and that our Father-Mother God sent me here to tell you that there's nothing in the whole world to be afraid of."

"You'll let go of me if you put out the light."

"No, I'll come right back, and hold you close till you know that there's nothing to dream of but flowers, till the sun peeps in at us."

"All right," breathed Junior; and when Camilla came back to bed, she let him cuddle into her arms again; and long after he was asleep, she lay awake with her peaceful, thankful thoughts.

CHAPTER IX

THE TRIUMPHANT CHORD

THE child slept so late the next morning that Camilla's toilet was finished when he opened his eyes.

He always awoke at odds with the world, and this morning was no exception. However, when he saw Camilla moving about the nursery, it startled him out of his waking mood.

Before she had observed that his eyes were open, a knock sounded at the door, and when Camilla opened it, the waitress Bessie appeared.

"Good-morning, miss. Mr. Barnes's compliments," she said, "and when you're ready, will you come down to breakfast? I'm to bring Junior's breakfast up and give it to him."

"You won't!" exclaimed the boy rudely.
"She promised —"

"Yes, yes, Junior," said Camilla hastily.
"Will you please tell Mr. Barnes that I promised to have breakfast up here? Can't I come down and bring it up myself? It's a good deal of trouble to bring two breakfasts."

"Oh, no, miss. We always brought two."

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"Very well, then. We'll be ready in just a few minutes."

"He's got a dressing-gown, miss, that Mam'selle uses when he sleeps late." Bessie spoke pleasantly. She was relieved not to be obliged to suffer the morning mood of the heir of the house, and she went to the closet and produced the little gown.

Then she went away and Camilla approached her charge.

"Is n't this a beautiful morning?" she said. "Up with my boy, and into the tub we go."

Junior got out of bed mechanically. His small brain was busy. He remembered no detail of all that had occurred in the middle of the night; but he recollect ed clearly that before going to sleep he had informed the Creator of his wish that Camilla should remain with him. Being, however, a misanthrope and decidedly of the conviction that Heaven helps those who help themselves, he was planning not to let this wonderful person out of his sight.

The nursery was a large room and Camilla noticed a door on the opposite side from the bathroom. She also remembered the chaotic noises in there last evening.

When she finally fastened the small frogs

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across the child's finely tailored dressing-gown and Junior's brown hair was brushed smoothly, she had ascended still further in his estimation. She had not hurt his ears washing him, nor pulled his hair.

"Where do you have your breakfast?" she asked.

"On this table," replied the boy, pulling at one against the wall.

"Would n't it be nice if we could go into that next room so as to let the sun and wind fairies sweep and dust in here?"

Junior regarded her solemnly, and she wondered if he ever smiled.

"I don't care," he answered.

Camilla opened the door of the deserted room. There were signs of sudden flight, and a pitcher lay broken on the floor.

She gathered up the pieces in a paper, pulled and pushed the furniture into place, and by the time she had brought in the table and opened all the windows in the nursery and bathroom, Bessie appeared with the tray.

"Mr. Barnes's compliments, miss, and he told me to say that he would come up here as soon as he finishes breakfast."

"That will be nice, won't it, to see Daddy?"

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said Camilla as she tied the little boy's bib. She was all unconscious that in this operation she was making herself still more poignantly desirable to the fragile little creature because her knuckles did n't hurt him while she tied it.

"No," was the surprising reply, "Daddy does n't need to come up here."

Experience had taught the child that self-control was sometimes to his advantage. He was practicing it now in not voicing his fears to Camilla. He knew very well that Daddy was coming for the purpose of taking his new friend away, and he felt that she was too yielding to be trusted with their defense.

Camilla looked at him with yearning compassion. She felt intuitively that Mrs. Barnes would prefer a different sort of person installed in her house; one with no claims of old friendship with the husband who had evolved into a different sphere of life.

She made no reply to Junior's remark, but set his breakfast before him as attractively as possible. She, too, felt that his father's visit was to be a vital occasion, and she felt very tender toward the flattering jealousy which she believed underlay the child's unwillingness to see the only member of the family whom he loved.

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"Well, well, here's a new plan," said Mr. Barnes when he passed through the wind-swept nursery and came upon the pair at breakfast. "How's my little son this morning?" As he spoke he stooped and kissed the child's forehead, then seated himself near by. "What of the night, Camilla? You look as if you had survived it."

Junior had ceased eating as soon as his father appeared, and now with his well-brushed head lowered, he was looking up at him with an expression which James Barnes saw was distinctly inimical. Thinking the pale little fellow was in an unusually cross morning mood his heart sank with the expectation that Camilla would decline any such undertaking as this. Thinking to introduce cheerful and jocose memories, he met his son's fixed gaze and continued:—

"Did the bird like her nest, or is she ready now when you have finished breakfast to fly off in the motor with me?"

Here was Junior's cue. He had known very well that this was his father's intention, and gesturing with his spoon, he delivered himself as follows, with many nervous gasps and frequent stuttering:—

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"No!" he began with explosive violence. "I t—told God I—last night that I wa—wanted Camel to st—stay here now and — and — and all the days; and G—God will do what I — what I say; 'cause — 'cause Camel said so; and if — if you t—take her away, He'll b—b—burn you up in hell, 'cause I—I saw the picture, and the — the devil, he's got a—a fork in his tail—"

"Darling!" breathed Camilla. She put repressive arms around the small, tense, jerking figure; and James Barnes, who had been staring, his jaw fallen, burst into riotous laughter. He rose, apparently to get his breath, and walked the floor of the little room, starting every few steps on a fresh peal, and taking out his handkerchief to wipe his tearful eyes. Junior watched him inflexibly. He wanted to cry himself, but this was no time for such indulgence. He pushed Camilla away. Judge and jury must decide this case before the amenities of life could be acceptable from anybody.

At last the severity of his father's spasm passed, and James Barnes turned, still laughing and wiping his eyes.

"Well, Camilla," he said, "you've heard. Is your interest in my immortal soul sufficient

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to keep you here under all the circumstances?"

"I'd like to stay, Jim. It's what I came for," replied Camilla simply; and whatever the others might feel, in her ears were sounding triumphant harmonies that sanctioned and blessed her undertaking. "If I stay, it is understood that it is not as one of your old friends, but as Junior's new friend. My life is to be lived with him, I take my meals with him. We must see what Mrs. Barnes says."

James Barnes lifted his hands. "She will say, 'Mirabile dictu,'" he returned. "To-day she won't say anything. She will be too busy reading her paper at the club. I have learned the title. It is 'Psychology in the Nursery.'"

The grotesqueness of the whole situation combined with the relief of the father's heart was too much for James Barnes, and again he shook, and paced the floor. At last he paused beside his boy. "We're pretty lucky, little son, eh," he asked, "to have a dove fly right down out of the sky and light in your nursery?"

"Good-bye, Daddy," was Junior's only response. He had known grown-ups to change their minds.

"Camilla," Mr. Barnes approached her and held out his hand; "you're sending me down to

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the office feeling like a new man." He spoke earnestly and with a grave face. "Tell me your hotel and let me have your traps sent up."

She laughed and her eyes twinkled. "There was only one trap, and you fell into it," she answered. "The truth will out. Cherry gave me the idea that I might be useful here and a suit-case at the station is all I have at this end of the route. I'll give you the check for that, if I may, and send to Brierly for my trunk. I left everything packed. Now you know the full extent of my brazenness."

James Barnes looked at her admiringly. "You're a wonder!" he exclaimed. "Say, Camilla," with sudden happy thought, "what's the matter with our going after the trunk?"

Junior's pallid face flushed. "You'll — you'll —" he began threateningly.

"You, too, you, too, I mean, little chap," added his father hastily. "I want to see the farm and we'll motor out to-morrow if it's pleasant."

Then Camilla saw what she had not yet discovered, namely, that it was possible for her charge to smile. It was a pale moonbeam of a smile and the big eyes took no part in it; but

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Junior was experiencing a moment of great contentment in which he dismissed suspicions of his parent and received him back into favor. He held out his hand and James Barnes took it and kissed him again.

"Good-bye, Junior," he said. "I may differ with you on some points of theology, but in the main I think your heart's in the right place and you certainly know how to pick a winner. Good-bye. I'll go and scratch gravel extra hard so as to get a holiday to-morrow."

When the door had closed upon his father, Junior glanced up at his companion with a sigh of satisfaction.

"You see," she said, "it was right, and so it came to us. Now we must finish our breakfast or Bessie will think we're very slow."

But Junior's feeble appetite was satisfied. "I don't want any more," he replied.

"I do," said Camilla, taking another muffin. "These are delicious. Did you ever see a little bird in the nest open its mouth to be fed? You open yours and I'll show you what happens." Junior opened his mouth and she popped in a piece of the muffin. He accepted it, and it was followed by a spoonful of egg; but the little boy soon wearied of the game, and, leaning back

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in his chair, looked at this marvelous new playmate, to see what she would do next.

Camilla drank her coffee; then drew a napkin over the tray.

"Now, then, do you think those sun and wind fairies are through in the nursery?" she asked.

Camilla had an eager, happy way of speaking, which would infuse zest into the most listless; but Junior had his own self-respect to maintain.

"There are n't any fairies — I know that," he said, with a sophisticated air.

He was such a pale, languid little specimen as he lay back looking at her, that Camilla longed to get a rocking-chair in some quiet corner and gather him to her breast for the rest of the day. Instead of that she answered brightly:—

"All right. You come and see!" She rose and threw open the nursery door, letting in a fresh breath of wind. She closed all the windows. Junior got down from his chair and followed her.

"That's all, this morning, little breezes," she said. "Thank you so much. That's their name — breezes," she explained, as she untied Junior's bib.

A long patch of sunlight filtered down be-

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tween this house and the next and lay across the rug.

"See that dear sunbeam. She wants to stay. Shall we let her?"

Junior still felt suspicious that this was unmanly sport. It was daylight now and he was not afraid of anything, and quite captain of his soul.

"We can't help its staying," he said, with a superior air.

Camilla raised her eyebrows at him and going across to the window lowered the shade. The rug became a dusky patch.

"Now she's outside," she said mysteriously. She raised her voice. "Do you wish we'd let you in, Sunbeam?" She asked it with such apparent sincerity and listened at the window with such expectation that Junior forgot his dignity for the moment and moved to the window, looking tiny in his smart little befrogged dressing-gown.

"I'll let her in," he said, and snapped up the shade with a vigor that would have won him a sharp reprimand from Mademoiselle.

The sunshine flowed again across the floor.

"See how happy she is to run back!" cried Camilla.

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"Let's — let's let in the others — the breezes," suggested Junior, taking hold of the window.

"They're a little too cold yet. Every day they'll get warmer; but can't you smell how fresh and sweet they've made the room? Now they have to fly away to Brierly and blow all around the farm and get it ready for us to come."

"Do they?" asked Junior cautiously. He wished Camilla to understand that while he might indulge her, he was very different from that baby who probably liked this sort of thing.

"Yes, they're the busiest fairies in the world: breezes everywhere, sunbeams everywhere, and now in springtime with all the trees and flowers to take care of, and with all the little leaves and buds they have to coax out, you can imagine whether we're lucky to have one take time to lie around on our rug."

While Camilla talked she was taking off the little dressing-gown and putting on Junior's day clothes. There were such contagious stars in her eyes that he smiled faintly.

"Mam'selle and I found some dandelions when we went to walk yesterday," he said. "I picked 'em."

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"That was fun, was n't it? They're just about the first flowers to pop up out of the ground and say, 'Hello. Spring's here. Come on, all the rest of you.'"

Junior looked off, considering. Camilla was doubtless quite silly, but he liked to hear her talk, world-hardened though he was.

"Now, then," she continued, when his tie was adjusted under the broad collar, "let's build our nests"; and she said it as if of all the fun in the world nest-building was the most delightful.

The little boy did n't get her meaning at once, but when she approached the beds, both pulled out from the wall and with mattresses upturned, he saw what she meant to do.

"Bessie makes the beds," he said. "Mam'selle would n't. She said she was n't a — a do—*domestique*."

"What an idea!" laughed Camilla. "Think if you were a bird how you'd like to have some other bird build your nest."

She seized the mattress of Junior's bed and turned it over into place. He stood still in the shaft of light on the rug, watching her.

"That sunbeam is kissing your hair," she said. "My! It's nice to be loved by a sunbeam;

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but I don't believe she'd mind if you came and helped me with the nest."

"I don't know how," said Junior. "Bessie does it all alone."

"Yes, but a bird never builds a nest alone. Its mate always helps. You can stand on the other side and be the mate if you'd like to."

Junior walked slowly around to the back of the bed and pulled up the sheet with Camilla. Bessie coming in for the tray beheld him with amazement.

"Sure, I'd do that for you, miss," she said. Camilla's smile and offer to bring up the breakfast-tray had won her.

"Junior and I like to do it, thank you, Bessie. The tray is in the other room. Now goes in the soft moss," said Camilla, as the child's slow little hands helped her with the blanket.

Bessie told the tale in the kitchen to the incredulous cook.

"It's like a lamb he is," she averred. "The dago at the corner told me once it was good luck to touch a hunchback. Sure Junior's got it. It's the first bit o' luck ever come his way."

CHAPTER X

BY THE FIRESIDE

MABEL's paper was enthusiastically received. She entered her motor-car that afternoon with the plaudits of the other clubwomen ringing in her ears. Such sympathy with childhood was touching. Such grasp of the necessity of strength fused with gentleness was inspiring. She wished that Victor might have heard the applause and the comments. He would see how much truer economy of force it was to inspire the larger motherhood than to incapacitate one's self by lying awake with one fretful child.

She reached home in a glow of satisfaction, and entered the house holding her roll of manuscript and wondering if she should yield to the strenuous urging of her admirers to have it published.

Bessie met her in the hall. "Mr. Barnes left word would you call him up as soon as you came in, ma'am."

The elation died out of Mabel's face. To be sure, she did have a husband. She proceeded to her sanctum and, throwing off her wraps, seated

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herself by the desk and picked up the 'phone. A vague and irritating wonder concerning Junior assailed her. She had not had time to see him before she went out; and probably her husband, with a narrow disregard for the greatest good to the greatest number, was about to reproach her.

Her voice as she called him was cold and defensive. Somewhat to her relief, his sounded natural.

"Just come in, Mabel?"

"Yes, this minute."

"Not seen Junior yet, then?"

"No, I tell you I 'm just in; my wraps are not off. I received your message and thought it might be something important."

"Well it's rather surprising, anyway. When I went to the nursery this morning I found the small boy has taken the trouble of choosing a governess off our hands. He had engaged Camilla."

Mabel could hear her husband's mirth at the memory penetrating his words.

"Well, you know how I feel about it," she answered.

"I don't think you will when you get the whole idea," was the quiet reply. "That's the

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reason I wished to speak to you before you saw Miss Lovett. She consents to stay on condition that she is no more one of us than Mam'selle was. She wishes to take her meals with Junior and live her life with him."

"She is a most inappropriate person for the position, however," said Mabel firmly. "She can have no beneficial effect on Junior's brain."

"She can keep it sane, I imagine, and that's something. Moreover, I'm more interested in adding flesh to his bones than information to his mind just now. I thought I'd explain before you saw Camilla, so you'd understand that there is no guest business about it. At least, it's a solution of the present problem until you see somebody who to your mind fills the bill better, and it's a big relief to me. Have a successful time at the club?"

"Very," returned Mabel briefly.

"Glad to hear it. See you in an hour. Good-bye."

They both hung up and Mabel stared at her desk with discontented eyes.

Why should James talk as if it were such a dreadful thing for Junior to be left one day or even a few days without some one to watch his every movement? With such a kind maid as

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Bessie in the house, there was no reason why she should not hurry away as she had done to-day without making any special inquiries.

She remembered uncomfortably that she had last night told Camilla she might steal away as early as she liked this morning; and had not troubled herself to ask questions before she went out.

"All this pampering idea is absurd," she thought as she rose to change her gown for dinner. "Think of the children who are locked in while their mothers go to work. They grow up as well as any other children."

When her careless toilet was made,—of late she never minded ripped lace and half falling locks,—she did n't even consider as a reason that she was handsome in spite of them,—she went to the nursery. The door stood ajar, and before she entered she could see Camilla in a rocking-chair before the sparkling fire, Junior's long thin legs dangling from her low lap and his head pillow'd on her breast. It was a comfortable picture. Mabel's daily visit to the nursery had always been the signal for a recital of Junior's peccadilloes through all his waking and many of his sleeping hours. At these times the stepmother administered the reproofs neces-

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sary to mollify the small boy's guardian, and therefore the associations with her visits were such that when Junior heard the approaching step and, turning his head, recognized the visitor, his doubled fist beating the air in her direction signified all the repulse of which it was capable.

Mabel stood there in her trailing gown of pale gray crêpe with touches of pink, and looked very handsome and very hard.

Camilla moved slightly back from the fire, and caught the beating fist in her free hand.

"Good evening, Mrs. Barnes. Will you excuse my not rising with such a big lapful? May I pull this chair up for you?"

The speaker released Junior's fist and drew forward a neighboring wicker chair, and Mabel, after a moment's hesitation, sat down.

"My husband has just been telling me that you are going to stay with Junior for a time," she said.

"For all the days, all the days!" exclaimed the child, sitting straight up in Camilla's lap and glaring at his stepmother, "and if — and if you don't want her to, you'll — you'll burn up in h—."

"Junior!" Camilla caught his hand. "Don't

By the Fireside

say that again. Your Mamabel wants what is right. We all want what is right. Yes, Mrs. Barnes," — she turned to that lady, — "I have nothing to do just now and your husband thought I might fill a need here. It's the kind of work I love."

She spoke modestly, and smiled at Mabel with winning earnestness.

"And her trunk's at Brierly," said Junior, "and we're going in the motor to-morrow to get it — Daddy and Camel and me."

"I," corrected Mabel mechanically.

"No, not you!" exclaimed Junior with scowling vigor. "Just us."

"You can't have the car to-morrow," said his stepmother with dignity. "I'm sorry, but I have an important engagement for which I need it."

"We will have it," cried Junior, nodding and stammering as he always did when super-excited. "We'll go—go—early in the mor—morning, before you — you get up."

"Hush, Junior," replied Mamabel, rising with her queenly poise. "You are a very silly, rude little boy and you can't always have your own way. I will see you again, Miss Lovett," she added, for Junior had begun to cry angrily,

The Right Track

and nothing afflicted Mabel's nerves worse than the crying of a child.

She left the room, closing the door behind her; and Camilla tried to draw Junior's head back on her shoulder. He resisted, and pounded her breast with his clenched fist.

She put him down off her lap and rocked and gazed at the fire.

He stared at her through angry tears; then all his woes seemed to possess him at once. He could n't go to Brierly in the motor with Daddy and the wonderful one. Also he had pounded the wonderful one, and, tragedy of tragedies, she had put him away from her. He fell on his face on the floor and howled with abandon.

Camilla steadily dwelt on the truth about what seemed to be a little nervous wreck; then she began to sing.

Each time Junior paused to take breath he could hear her soft voice singing, and as the child loved music and was starved for it, and Camilla's voice was sweet and clear, he gradually controlled himself to listen. This was Camilla's song:—

By the Fireside

CAMILLA'S SONG

1. An an - gel flew down-ward from heav-en's gate And
2. But some would not hark to the an - gel's lay—Their
3. She float - ed one day to a child's true heart, Soft

came to the earth be - low... She sang a sweet song as she
earth songs they loved the best... They barred her out when she
winged as a snow - y dove. . He welcomed her in and her

wandered far; The peo- ple who heard tho't it fell from a star
tried to stay, So, sad and neg-lect-ed she flew.. a-way
heav'n-ly song Made ra-diant-ly hap-py his whole day long,

The Right Track

A musical score for 'The Right Track'. It consists of three staves of music. The top staff has lyrics: 'And it healed all their care and woe, It healed all their care and woe. Still seek-ing a place to rest, Still seeking a place to rest. For the an - gel's name was Love, The an - gel's name was Love.' The middle staff continues the melody. The bottom staff provides harmonic support with chords.

By the time Camilla had finished the second verse, Junior had slowly pulled himself up from the floor and come to her side. She put her arm around him and went on singing and looking at the fire while he leaned against her.

There was a moment's pause after the song ceased; then the little boy spoke:—

“Was the angel's name — Love?” he asked with a deep catch in his breath.

“Yes, and our Father-Mother God sent her; that same One we prayed to last night. Is n't it strange, Junior,” went on Camilla very quietly, “that we will cry and grow angry and make a noise instead of asking God for what we want?”

“Will He — will He give us the car to-morrow instead of Mamabel?”

By the Fireside

"Yes, unless it's right for her to have it. We want what's right, don't we?"

"No, I want the car."

"The angel's name was Love," said Camilla. "Shall we make it with your blocks?"

The small boy assenting, they both sat on the floor and built the word so that it stood in aggressively black capitals on a red background.

"Now I'll make a word and see if you can read it," said Camilla; and in a minute her own name stood upon the floor.

Junior read it letter by letter laboriously: "C-A-M-I-L-L-A."

"What does that spell?" she asked. Then as he looked puzzled she smiled at him and tapped herself on the chest.

Junior hung his head. "The place I slapped you?" he asked slowly.

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. "You did n't know what you were doing," she answered. "You were barring the angel out, were n't you?"

Then she picked up the block with "E" on it and placed it under the "I."

"That would be Camel, would n't it?" she asked; "but my name is a little different."

The Right Track

Then she repeated her own name by syllables.

"That's my name," she said. "Do you like it?"

Junior nodded.

"Can you say it?"

He said it after her, — "Camilla."

She kissed his cheek again. "Now, then," she said happily, "we've learned two things. The angel's name, and my name."

The child gave her his faint, moonlight smile, and at this moment Mr. Barnes knocked and entered.

His wife had told him that Junior was having one of his usual tantrums and that she could n't see that there was any change for the better in his surroundings as yet.

He was relieved that all was quiet when he reached the nursery door, and, upon opening it, was surprised to see a peaceful game of blocks going on.

Junior got up, went to him and drew him by the hand.

"We've made two names and I know 'em," he said. "Love, and Camilla."

"Are n't they the same?" asked James Barnes, with a grave look at his old friend.

By the Fireside

"No—o," returned Junior scornfully. "Look how different." He pointed at the block words, repeating them as he did so.

James Barnes sat down and took the little figure on his knee.

"We're pretty happy, are n't we, son, to have Love and Camilla."

"Yes; and the angel came in the little boy's heart and he did n't drive her away. He let her sit down and sing. Sing it to Daddy, Camel."

Camilla smiled at the child and pointed to her block name. "Sing it, Cam-il-la," he said obediently.

"I don't sing to grown-up people; just to little folks," she answered, pink coming into her cheeks.

"Yes, yes," ordered Junior imperiously. "My daddy'll like it."

"Do, Camilla," said Mr. Barnes. "A nice orderly room," — he glanced around the apartment whose neatness had impressed him on entering, — "a nice snapping fire, a good little boy who always says 'please' when he wants a nice lady sitting on the floor to sing to him, and a daddy all ready to listen."

"Pl—please," said Junior, nodding at the

The Right Track

little woman sitting Turkish fashion on the floor.

"Let's put her in a comfy rocking-chair first." And James Barnes, holding the child in one arm, rose and gave his other hand to Camilla; but she rose nimbly without help and seated herself in her lately vacated chair.

"You can sing it with me, perhaps, Junior," she said, and then her sweet, natural voice began the song.

Junior leaned his head against his father's shoulder and listened with satisfaction.

At the close of the last line he repeated in a thin, gentle little tone, which tried to sing the air: "For the Angel's name was Love." Then his hollow eyes lost their far-away expression and he sat up in his father's lap, coming back to affairs of real life. "Mamabel's hateful and mean, Daddy. She says she'll take the car to-morrow and we have to get Camel — Cam-il-la's trunk."

"First, we thank Miss Lovett for her pretty song."

"And then we don't bar out the angel," said Camilla, meeting the child's eyes.

"What angel?" he asked defiantly.

"Love," she answered.

By the Fireside

"Yes!" exclaimed the child, with all the vociferousness at his feeble command. "I want to be bad, and hate Mamabel."

His father gave him a little shake. "Look here, young man, you won't go a step to Brierly if you talk that way."

Junior's eyes filled with tears. He swallowed several times before he was able to voice a stammering threat.

"I'll — I'll — ask God, and then I — I guess you'll — you'll be sorry."

Camilla came close and took hold of his hand. "You see Junior wants to do right and be happy just as we all do," she said. "Mrs. Barnes did n't know you wanted the car; so she made another plan; but I want to tell you both what I've been thinking. I've been thinking that it's a very long ride in the motor for this little boy just now —" Junior pulled away his hand and raised a threatening fist — "and I wondered if it would n't be more fun for us all to go in the train."

The small fist fell and Junior's gloomy eyes became reflective.

James Barnes nodded. "I see," he returned quietly. "I think you're right."

"Yes, let's go in the train," said Junior, to

The Right Track

whom the motor was an old story and a steam engine a rare sight.

"And I want to tell you something, Junior," continued his father in the same quiet tone. "It seems to me this nursery would be a pretty lonely place if Miss Lovett should get tired of hearing you say rude things and behave like a bear instead of a boy, and should go away."

Junior's response was a surprise. "Bears love their babies," he said, with a far-away look, "and they lick them — so," and he illustrated with his tongue on his father's hand.

James Barnes bit his lip. It struck him that the teaching of the last twenty-four hours must have been all-embracing.

"If you don't want Camilla to fly away to another nest you'd better mend your manners."

Junior looked very solemn under this impossibly awful suggestion. He was glad his father did not know that he had struck his new friend a few minutes ago. Mam'selle would have told of it as soon as his daddy entered the room. Camilla started to speak again, and he wondered for an instant if she were going to tell.

"Junior has some very wonderful things to learn," she said slowly. "He has to learn what the real things are in the beautiful world God

By the Fireside

made. He has to learn that hating and striking don't bring him anything. They are n't real things any more than the tigers were real that he thought were behind the screen. Hating and striking make him unhappy just as those make-believe lions and tigers did, but they're none of them real."

Junior's gaze rested deep in those wells of light, Camilla's eyes. A very novel sensation rose in his breast, rose and swelled and filled his throat and then his eyes. He suddenly turned his face against his father's breast and wept softly, quietly.

"What is it, son?" asked James Barnes in surprise, holding the pathetic little figure close.

The need for confession sent convulsive words to the child's lips. They were just audible.

"I p—pounded Cam-illa," he sobbed; and the father smiled across at his old friend with a lump in his own throat: tribute to his son's first tears of repentance.

CHAPTER XI

ELM FARM

It was such a May day as the poets sing when James Barnes, Camilla, and Junior took the train for Brierly. It was hard to tell which of the trio was best satisfied as they descended at the station and found waiting the carryall for which Mr. Barnes had telegraphed.

Exaggerated accounts of his wealth and importance were afloat in his home village, and the news that he was coming had circulated freely since the arrival of the telegram to Pete Miller last evening.

"Jim Barnes is all right," was the consensus of opinion in the village; and the few friends who had made it a point to happen in at the general store, situated near the depot, at the time of the train's arrival, had a double excitement in seeing Camilla Lovett in company with the great man and in charge of the big-eyed, pale-faced heir of the house of Barnes.

Mr. Barnes satisfied all the stragglers with his bluff, cheerful greeting, and finally succeeded in getting started on the road to the farm.

The driver, whose desk in school had been

Elm Farm

next to that of his passenger in the days when they snow-balled together, showed none of the satisfaction which he felt on being secure of half an hour's tête-à-tête with the visitor. Camilla and Junior were stowed away on the back seat, and circumstances favored Pete Miller.

"Sorry for Metcalf's trouble," said Mr. Barnes as the horse started. "Has n't made a go of the farm, either, I understand."

Pete expectorated deftly from the side of the carryall.

"No, not a chance for his sort," he returned. "He don't belong to this part o' the country any way, and even if he had his health he don't know how to get along. Another case of an abandoned farm, I guess. Lucretia's been there helpin' 'em the last week or two. Mrs. Metcalf's so scared and down in the mouth and worried over money matters — I guess buyin' the farm took all they had. They had the idea that livin' close to the soil, as the sayin' is, would set him up and make him vigorous; but it has n't worked out. Lucretia's been stayin' there nights, too, lately."

"How is Lucretia?" asked Mr. Barnes with reflective interest.

"You ask that!" drawled Pete. "Git ap,

The Right Track

General. Don't you know folks that's made o' steel springs without an ounce o' flesh extra are always up to snuff?"

"Lucretia always was smart," returned James Barnes.

"Yes. Kind o' goes against her that I drive the livery," said Pete. "Seems to think 't ain't active enough." The speaker straightened up a little from the position of slouching comfort in which he was holding the reins between his knees. "I asked her if she'd like it any better if I was to run alongside the hoss."

James Barnes smiled. Pete Miller was a widower, and he and his spinster cousin had lived together for some years in the ancestral cottage; a tumbledown affair in spite of Lucretia's indefatigable efforts to prop it up and mend it up; efforts in which Pete was always too busy to coöperate.

"I've lived out o' cans mostly for two weeks past 'count o' the Metcalfs," continued the driver. "I'll be glad when they can scrape the funds together to take 'em off where they ought to go. 'T ain't goin' to be an easy matter to sell that farm, though. The folks that bought it o' your father was awful pleased to slide it off onto Metcalf."

Elm Farm

Mr. Barnes looked at the landscape. Buds were leafing in the deceptive embraces of the warm May sunshine.

He turned around to the silent pair on the back seat of the old carriage.

"Lucretia will be surprised to see you, Camilla," he said.

"Does she know you are coming?" asked Camilla.

"Yes. I wired Mr. Metcalf last night."

The reply was quiet and gave no hint of the relief and thankfulness which that long and comprehensive telegram had carried to the discouraged dwellers at the farm.

"See that big rock, Junior?" continued Mr. Barnes, as they passed a smooth mound of granite by the roadside. "I remember when that rock was a mountain. Do you think it would be fun to slide down it?"

"I don't know," replied the fragile, unsmiling little boy, regarding the rock with grave interest.

"Well, take my word for it, it is. I'll show you some day." The speaker smiled. "I remember when Lucretia used to plant her feet in my back, and I mine in yours, Pete, and we went down that rock like a limited express."

The Right Track

Pete grinned. "And we got warmed some for wearin' out the seats of our trousers."

"I guess we did; but then the slices of fresh bread hot out of the oven that your mother used to give us — I'll never forget how those tasted. They were an inch thick and the butter melted on them; and if I could digest one now, I should consider myself an ostrich. There's the very door they came out of."

Near the great rock was a small house, faded as to paint, and with a little ploughed ground.

The Miller cottage was the nearest neighbor to Elm Farm, and now on the other side of the street the broad acres of James Barnes's old home came into view. Dividing the wide meadow land stood a long avenue of elm trees just coming into leaf, their branches touching and sometimes locking to make a Gothic arch. To all but Junior the scene was familiar and the little boy regarded it with some interest as Pete's white horse turned lumberingly into the avenue. His father's bedtime stories in the era before Mamabel came had always been of the farm. There was the brook, which, winding through the meadow, ran beneath the raised wood road and hurried out on the other side to run past the cornfield and on into a mysterious

Elm Farm

thicket of oaks and maples where a pond with stoned sides had once held fish, but now was the domain of huge bullfrogs whose voices resounded through the magic wood.

The house was set on a rise of ground.

At the end of the avenue the road forked, one path, for the butcher and baker, leading up-hill to the kitchen door, and one sweeping up to the front piazza of the roomy farmhouse. Between these roads was a triangular hillside of grass, studded to-day with dandelions. The elm avenue ran east and west, the house at right angles with it faced south; and across the road in front of the house two wide terraced steps of grass stood at the top of the hillside, at the foot of which flowed the brook which found its way through the meadow. This brook had its source in a large pond, which fell over a dam in a pleasantly noisy waterfall, and the pond was bordered thickly with trees.

James Barnes, standing at the moment of arrival on the worm-eaten piazza, looked off at the irregular, hilly sky-line with satisfaction. At each end of the terraced grass stood an imposing elm tree.

Everything about the place was shabby and betokened a meager pocketbook.

The Right Track

"I may be a fool," he thought, "and Mabel will be sure to disapprove; but I can afford to be a fool, at any rate; and some good may come of it to the boy."

The stir of arrival had been noted from within, and now a little woman with circles around her eyes and smiles on her lips opened the door. She could scarcely speak as she clasped James Barnes's hand and her eyes shone with sudden tears.

He introduced Camilla and Junior to Mrs. Metcalf, and she took them all within.

Mr. Metcalf was abovestairs, saving his strength for the interview with the man who had lifted his cares with such suddenness.

"We'd like to go to Boston this afternoon if it's a possible thing," said Mrs. Metcalf. "My sister's there and will help us get started for the West."

"Certainly you can," replied Mr. Barnes. "You remember I told you I'd take everything, furniture and all, just as it stands."

"Oh, I do," said the little woman, biting her lip for self-control. "Lucretia and I have been up all night packing. We were so glad — so thankful —"

"That's all right," returned James Barnes

Elm Farm

when her voice failed her. "It's the beginning of good times for you, you may be sure; and there's Lucretia now," he added with relief, as a tall, angular form in a collarless dress and long gingham apron appeared from the back of the hall.

Lucretia was just as good as anybody and she remembered Jim Barnes in school; but during thirty years she had seldom seen him; and to all appearances a stranger stood before her now, a city man in a light spring overcoat. He would not have recognized her but that Pete had said she was here, and had described her steel-spring anatomy. He thought he could see signs of it now in her rigid throat, as she gave him her hand awkwardly.

"How do you do, Mr. Barnes?" she said. "We've been blessin' you all night, Mrs. Metcalf and me."

"That must be why I feel so good to-day," returned the grain dealer.

"And after you've talked with my husband," said Mrs. Metcalf, "Lucretia's going to give you all your dinner."

"Oh, we did n't expect that. I thought to send Pete over to the Shanklins' and tell them we would descend on them pretty soon."

The Right Track

"No, you won't," said Lucretia firmly. "We've got corned beef and cabbage enough for all."

"Then you could n't drive me away," declared James Barnes heartily; and then he followed Mrs. Metcalf upstairs, while Lucretia greeted Camilla as an old friend and met Junior, who regarded her with curiosity, especially her bare arms with their stringy muscles.

"I'll take you to the spare room and let you wash your face if you want to," said Lucretia, regarding Camilla with as great curiosity as the small boy showed about herself.

"You was always close-mouthed, Camilla," she said as they moved away. "Cherry Shanklin told me about New York settin' you up so fine, but I don't believe she knows, does she, that you're so friendly with the Barneses as all this."

"It's only two days, Lucretia," replied Camilla; "so I scarcely know it myself. I went there and found this little boy wanted some one to work and play with, so I was glad to stay."

"It's a real good place, too, I guess," said Lucretia, ushering them into the chill white spare room and pouring water into the wash-bowl. "I know 't was just like a message fallin'

Elm Farm

down out o' heaven when Pete brought up the telegram from Mr. Barnes last night, tellin' how he'd take the whole farm and everything on it, 'lock, stock and barrel,' and give 'em money down to go West with. It'll like as not save Mr. Metcalf's life."

Camilla smiled at Junior with one of her happy, mysterious looks:—

"And this was all a secret from us, was n't it, Junior? Daddy never told us he was coming to his own farm!"

Junior yielded his hands to be washed. "Law," said Lucretia, "I did n't know I was lettin' any cat out o' the bag. It has n't leaked out in the village yet, I guess. Folks 'll be some stirred up when they know this is going to be the Barneses' farm again. What a peaked young one," added Lucretia, regarding Junior calmly.

Camilla shook her head at her friend over his unconscious head.

"Oh," said Lucretia, "I did n't say anything, only 't he looks kind o' meachin'."

"I wonder if Mr. Barnes thought to speak to Pete," said Camilla. "We expected to drive over to the Shanklins' for dinner. What do you suppose Pete 's doing?"

"I s'pose he's holdin' down the seat o' that

The Right Track

carryall," returned Lucretia acidly. "I'd better go and tell him to go back."

"Oh, I would n't," replied Camilla quickly; "not until Mr. Barnes says so. I don't know what the plans are. Can't I set the table for you, Lucretia?"

"It's all set; but I must go back to the kitchen and get your dinner ready. I'll be back to my own house to-morrow. I dread to see what a pigpen it'll be with Pete lumberin' around there alone and spillin' everything he touches."

But Lucretia's plans were destined to a change.

After Pete's horse had had a meal from the scanty store in the barn, and the family, all but Mr. Metcalf, had eaten dinner, the invalid well wrapped was placed in the carriage and with happy and grateful farewells started for the train, Pete being armed with a telegram to send from the station to the sister, and with orders to return with a wagon for the trunks. He accepted his mission with relish. It was a triumphant moment for him to be the first one to inform the village that Jim Barnes had bought back the old homestead.

When the carriage had gone, Camilla and

Elm Farm

Junior went out on the rough, neglected terrace to pick dandelions. Camilla looked about the place with a good deal of interest on her own account. Squire Barnes had been an object of awe and admiration to her childhood, and such sense of aristocracy as may obtain in a New England village had found a representation at Elm Farm, where the former owner had made it his pleasure to keep the grass about the house velvety and the trees well trimmed. There had been an atmosphere of rural elegance about the place in those days, and the memory was as green with Camilla as the grass she was treading.

"It's stranger than fiction," she thought, "that I should be here, at home, even for a day."

"I saw the steel springs in her neck," announced Junior, breaking in on her meditations while he added to the golden bouquet in his hand.

"What's that?"

"The man in the carriage said she was made of steel springs, and I saw 'em jump up and down in her neck while we ate dinner."

Camilla laughed. "What busy eyes my boy has! You must be careful not to say anything

The Right Track

to hurt Lucretia's feelings. Her cousin was just being funny when he said that."

"Was she being — funny when she called me — those things upstairs?"

"Oh, yes, indeed. Lucretia's very kind. She only meant it would be nice for you to roll around in this sunshine on the grass and drink a lot of milk and get red cheeks. These people that live in the country are used to red cheeks."

Meanwhile James Barnes had sought Lucretia where she was clearing up the remains of dinner in the kitchen. She was surprised and not overly pleased to see him in the midst of her disorder. His well-groomed person and his city clothes were out of place here and made her feel awkward in spite of the well-known fact that she was just as good as anybody.

"I need to talk with you, Lucretia," he said.
"Can you spare time?"

It was a fortunate beginning. Lucretia wiped her veined hands on a clean, ragged roller towel. "I guess so," she answered. "The days are long, and I kind o' feel as if the world had rolled off my shoulders now those folks are gone."

"Then suppose we come in here by the dining-room table," said James Barnes.

Elm Farm

He had a sheet of foolscap paper and a pencil in his hand.

"Mrs. Metcalf says she does n't know what they'd have done without you," he remarked, as they sat down at the table still covered with a coarse and patched tablecloth.

"Well, I dunno either, to tell the truth," replied Lucretia bluntly. "She has n't any faculty and he has n't any health. They might 'a' known farm life wa'n't the thing for them."

"What do you think of my buying back this place, Lucretia? Do you believe it's good business?"

"Yes, for the Metcalfs," was the dry reply, the thin lips twitching in a smile.

"You think I'm foolish, eh?"

"Well, you may as well know it first as last: this farm's petered out. It'd take a lot o' money to make it worth anything again. I'm glad you done it 'cause those poor folks was at their last gasp. There's a cow in the barn, but that's the last o' their critters; and this table-cloth" — Lucretia lifted the threadbare damask — "is a good sample o' the furnishin's you'll find all over the house. There ain't anybody that could pare a cheese any thinner than they've pared theirs for a year past, and what-

The Right Track

ever you've paid for the whole business, it's too much; but *I'm glad of it*," finished Lucretia defiantly. "You ain't as bad off as they are at that."

"Right you are," said James Barnes, laughing; "and Lucretia," he added, sobering and speaking whimsically, almost as if he were ashamed, "you don't know what a thrill it gives me to think I own those elms down there." He motioned with his head toward the avenue visible from where they were sitting.

"All right," returned Lucretia dispassionately. "I hope it'll last."

"That depends somewhat on you," said her companion, meeting her eyes.

"For the land's sake," she remarked, mystified, but flattered.

"You know as well as I do," he went on, "that any one I could employ from the city to help me here would be strange, and ignorant of our ways." (Obscure touch of flattery, but it told.) "She'd be lonely, too, and impossible generally."

"I'm goin' home to-night," said Lucretia firmly.

"Well, not till you've heard me out, anyway, will you?"

Elm Farm

"No; I can't leave Pete any longer. He's the most shiftless lazybones" — began Lucretia decidedly.

"Now, wait. I bought this farm on an impulse that's been spurring me periodically for a year. You don't want to make me feel I've got a white elephant, do you?"

"It's none o' my business," returned Lucretia, leaning back in her chair and sniffing hard-heartedly.

"One of my great reasons was my little boy's health. You see what he looks like."

"Kind o' faded, I must say," agreed Lucretia.

"I believe in a farm for children. Resorts don't amount to much. I have n't told my wife anything about this yet. She won't care for it because she is very studious and public-spirited and the advantages of the city appeal to her; so I've got to paddle my own canoe. See? Now, you were up all last night and so was I, practically, making what I believed would be a good working plan out here. I did n't know you were helping the Metcalfs; but I had in mind just such a person as you are, with a husband, or a relative who would be the backbone of this place."

The Right Track

"Pete has n't got any. He's limbered his for all time settin' on the front seat o' that carriage."

"Well, we'll see, we'll see. You've enough for both, and I'm not giving you up, Lucretia, and looking around for somebody else until you finally turn me down."

James Barnes then unfolded his idea of a salary for Lucretia, which, after the mite bestowed upon her by the Metcalfs, made her look off out the window and meditate upon what neighbor might jump at this opportunity if she let it slip.

"My idea would be," went on Mr. Barnes, "to fix up that barn chamber for Pete, and make him a general utility man — a man-of-all-work."

Lucretia's lips twitched again in a smile. "He might be the first—I don't know; but as to bein' a man-of-all-work! Well, the place would n't suit him, Mr. Barnes. Could n't be made to."

"Leave that to me. I'd teach him to drive a car —"

"A *what!*!" exclaimed Lucretia. "Do you mean an au-to-mo-bile up to this ~~farm~~?"

"Certainly! I think Pete would rather like it."

Elm Farm

"Might be!" responded Lucretia, her eyes still big with the expansion of ideas. "He could set and do it. There's no tellin'."

"The first thing I would have you and Pete do is to clear out everything in this house. Any things you'd like for your own cottage, take them. The rest, sell or give away. Make a clean sweep. My daughter, Elaine, will be home in a few weeks. I am hoping she may take an interest in fixing up the place; but at any rate, the first thing is to get everything clean, and mended, and use some fresh paint."

Greater light came into his listener's eyes. "Everything clean and mended and painted," she said with excitement. Imagine having money enough to speak with nonchalance of such a transformation!

"I know you can keep accounts, for the Metcalfs showed me how you had helped them. I shall give you full charge. You can perhaps rent your cottage to some one who will take good care of it."

Lucretia no longer sat back in her chair. Her eyes were absolutely round. The springs worked in her throat. She foresaw a time of excitement such as never had been known in Brierly,—a motor-car going up and down the elm avenue;

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money to dispense; herself in charge. What would they say at the ladies' sewing society!

"It's a good position, Lucretia, for a woman with faculty," said James Barnes at last.

"I accept it," declared Lucretia Watt, her thin cheeks reddening.

The vista of power and importance which opened before her made her reckless. She had the sensation of burning all the bridges behind her.

CHAPTER XII

SUN AND SHADOW

JAMES BARNES had had the training in unselfishness which comes to a devoted husband in the companionship of a delicate wife. The five dreary years after her death had been bravely borne; and the joyousness which sprang into his life at Mabel Ford's acceptance of him was dying hard. His chief comfort to-day was that no one, not even she herself, knew what she had done to him. His narrow, prosaic social circle looked on him with admiration as the possessor of a handsome young wife whose head had never been turned, but whose aspirations were sedate and intellectual. He received their compliments graciously.

Never in his long reflections upon their relations did he upbraid her in his own mind.

"Poor child, she did n't want to marry me," was his habitual defense of Mabel's indifference, "and I have given her the opportunities that satisfy her. It is the fortune of war."

The instinct to turn to his wife for sympathy in his interests was fast being inhibited, but

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little by little the hurt was becoming less keen, and the stately young woman was being gradually put further and further out of that ardent heart of hearts which used to crave her.

There was no direct railroad from Brierly to the city, and while Junior slept with his head in Camilla's lap, Mr. Barnes talked to her of his plans during their tedious little trip home from the farm.

There was a boyish twinkle in his eyes. He felt as he had often done in school days, after achieving a feat of mischievous daring, when it was too late to repent.

When finally their taxi drew up before the home steps the stars were out.

The lights in the living-room were dim, so the travelers ascended the stairs to Mrs. Barnes's study. Victor Ford was there with his sister. He had been obliged to postpone his plan to remain away from the house because of business which had arisen regarding the sub-letting of the old apartment.

He rose as the trio came in, and Mabel greeted them.

"Home again," she said, and advanced to meet her husband, presenting her cheek for his kiss. He touched her face with his lips.

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"We're very empty of supper and very full of news," he said.

"News in Brierly?" returned Mabel. "Is n't that rather a paradox? Why did n't you dine before you left there?" Her brow wrinkled and her tone betrayed the annoyance she felt at having to consider an unseasonable repast.

"Well, there was a strike in all the hotels, you see," said James Barnes. "What's the matter? Servants all out?"

"I don't know; but probably Bessie's in, entertaining her sweetheart in the kitchen."

"Well, perhaps she'll be generous enough to give us something. If not, I suppose the ice-box is at the old address."

Victor Ford felt the blood surging up into his face as it had the habit of doing in his sister's house.

"I'll go down and take the message, shall I?" he asked.

"We'll all go in a minute," returned Mr. Barnes. "First we have to tell our news. Junior, what were you going to tell Mamabel as soon as we got home?"

Junior, glassy-eyed and dazed with sleepiness and holding mechanically to a large bunch of dejected dandelions, swayed on uncertain legs.

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"We've got a farm," he announced stolidly.

"What does he—James!" exclaimed Mrs. Barnes with sudden enlightenment. "You don't mean to say you've bought that farm at the other end of nowhere?"

Her face flushed with vexation, and Camilla watched her in grave surprise.

"What did you do that for?" she finished.

"For myself," replied James Barnes dryly. He did not know until this moment that there had been a remnant of hope that his wife, who had often laughed at what she termed his one sentimentality, might feel a ray of gladness for him.

"I would have bought it for you," he added, "if I could have believed you would like it."

"Like it!" repeated Mabel contemptuously; "I should think not. I know well enough what those inland places are — always hot and full of mosquitoes and unbearably dull and inconvenient."

James Barnes's heart swelled and he shrank as at the belaboring of some dear one. His wife suddenly seemed a thousand miles away from him.

Camilla's heart ached for the speaker's blindness and the husband's smart. How different

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his face now from the gay one in the train. Victor was putting constraint on himself.

"It's your husband's old home that you're talking about, Mabel," he said.

"I know it. What's to prevent his seeing it whenever he wants to? But to buy it—to saddle himself with an outgrown, countrified place like that when we might go to Europe with the money—"

"You may go to Europe," said James Barnes, and his wife had heard this voice but once before; but it was suddenly controlled; "go whenever you wish; but probably you won't care to leave within the hour and we should like some supper. We had a bite at the farm before starting, but, Great Scott, it seems a long time ago, does n't it, Camilla?"

"I think I'll go and put Junior to bed," said the latter, "and bring him something."

Suiting the action to the word, Camilla led the child down the hall to the nursery. In spite of his somnambulistic condition, the little boy had felt the jarring atmosphere. "Mamabel's mad and I don't care," he said.

"Yes, we care," returned Camilla. "She'll be glad some day. She has n't seen the farm yet. Wait till she picks flowers with you."

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"I won't let her."

"Yes, indeed you will; and you'll show her the brook and the pond and all the lovely places. It'll be fun to surprise her."

The consideration of himself as cicerone being somewhat pleasing, Junior said no more and was soon tucked away to sleep.

Victor Ford's towering impatience with his sister submerged his sense of his own wrongs. The dignity and forbearance with which he had intended to treat his brother-in-law in return for the other's vigorous reproofs were forgotten. Even more, it was being gradually forced in upon his consciousness that those reproofs had been seasonable. The associations he had formed during the winter were not inclined to let him alone, and now he began to look at them with more of James Barnes's steady vision and to recognize them as stumbling-blocks instead of stepping-stones. He had a suspicion, in the light of events, that the warning had come just in time; and a revulsion of feeling toward his brother-in-law resulted. He was conscious of longing to make up to him in small degree for the disappointments marriage had brought him.

Victor never seemed to accomplish anything

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by talks to his sister. Her complacency was impenetrable and imperturbable. She had her all-important standards and James Barnes did not come up to any of them. Her daily strengthening habit of thought was that by the condescension of being wife to so unambitious a creature, she more than repaid all he might do for her. Had his nature not been fine-grained, chivalrous, and protective, she would have begun to see, ere the incident of the farm provoked her to frank rudeness, that her influence over him was not what it had been; but she was so fortified in her careless condescension to him and his friends, and her solid confidence in his admiration and love for herself, that she did not deign to notice symptoms. Why, indeed, should he not be happy in the possession of a superior being? She found her own satisfactions in the court of clubwomen to whom her deep purse brought many an advantage and who hailed with delight the zest which she brought to her work in their interests.

James Barnes had snubbed Mabel's brother when he offered him sympathy. This, too, Victor now acknowledged to be characteristic; and characteristic of James Barnes was beginning to mean heroism to his brother-in-law.

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A day or two afterward, therefore, Victor presented himself in the grain dealer's office.

James Barnes had been reading a letter and looked up from it with a rather rueful smile.

"From Elaine," he said. "I guess they've done it."

"Done what?" asked Victor, taking a seat by the desk.

"Finished her." He took from the desk-top the picture of the young girl in the white dress.

"Queer feeling, Ford, having the young ones grow up, get all their feathers, and before you know it be ready to fly out of the nest."

Victor Ford's mind worked swiftly and hopefully. It had occurred to him once or twice that Elaine would be coming back and that if she and Mabel struck sparks, new discomforts would be added to the Barneses' household. Something in the father's wording lighted a hope in his breast.

"Out of the nest?" he returned with courteous interest. "Do you mean that Miss Elaine has already formed some attachment—" he paused.

"Got a beau, do you mean? Oh, I believe there is n't any chance of that sort of thing in that place. Every girl there is supposed to be a

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selected gem and watched and guarded accordingly. No, it's only that this letter," tapping it with his fingers, "is so different from the sort my little girl used to write me. She's terribly grown up." The father laughed with some pride. "I'm going on next week to bring her home."

Victor's heart sank and he cleared his throat. "I just dropped in," he said, "to say that if you want to send me around on any errands regarding the farm, I'm not so busy as you are and I'd like to put myself at your service."

James Barnes looked up surprised. Then he looked down again. In the moment of silence he thought he understood that here was the offer of a partial *amende honorable*.

"Thank you, Ford. I think I shall take you up once in a while. I was wishing this morning I could be in two places at once. I have two Brierly characters in charge: one Lucretia Watt, and her cousin, Pete Miller. I am turning loose a lot of painters and calciminers and so on there." He stopped and looked somewhat wistfully at the young lawyer.

"Why don't I run out this morning and take a look and bring back a report?"

"Well, go ahead and do it, Ford, if you

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have n't anything driving you. I'd be very glad to have you."

"Sure," said Victor heartily. "Expect me when you see me; and I'll tell you all I know."

"Wait a minute," and James Barnes took out his pocketbook.

"No, thank you," returned Victor hastily. "I want to see the farm"; and he hurried out, closing the door behind him.

James Barnes replaced his pocketbook; then he read over Elaine's letter; and its formal and dutiful lines made him smile.

"Love to Mamabel, and you, dear Daddy," was the closing.

"Love to Mamabel." James Barnes bit his lips reflectively. He had long ago written Elaine of the pretty name coined by Junior for his step-mother, and when answering the latter's occasional notes to Elaine, the girl had adopted this name, greatly to her father's relief.

His face settled into heavy lines as he reflected now upon his daughter's home-coming and speculated upon the future. He had married against her will and she had been right. He dreaded the breaking-up of the present neutrality; the antagonism which was sure to ripen when Elaine became conversant with matters at home.

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She had never been domestic in her tastes. Would she be more so as she matured? Would she perhaps take the reins of the housekeeping? He was sure his wife would never miss them. The servants did now nearly all that was done.

With a heavy sigh and a quick movement he replaced his child's letter in the envelope.

"One day at a time," he muttered under his breath.

"And, then, there is Camilla." The thought came with reassurance. There was one spot in his unhomelike house which was a haven, and there his little boy was in a safe fold. There was surpassing comfort in the fact. Camilla had thoroughly approved his purchase of the farm if for nothing, she told him, but a playground for Junior.

It was her desire to take the child out at once and keep him there; but she did not express this. She wanted the initiative to come from Mrs. Barnes. She realized with painful clearness the thinness of the ice on which that lady was daily treading so confidently, and saw that she herself must move cautiously not to gain her ill-will.

The tête-à-tête dinners with his wife had come

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to be a burden to James Barnes. He managed to be obliged sometimes to dine at his club, and Mabel always took this announcement so cheerfully that he made the occasions increasingly frequent. When her husband was not coming home, Mrs. Barnes need not dress for dinner and could take a book to the table and read throughout the meal.

When he was there she usually inquired about his day and he about hers; but both had long ceased to listen to the brief stereotyped answers.

She told him of the servants' quarrels, and throughout the winter there had generally been some enormity of Junior's to divulge; but of late the child had not figured much in the conversation.

One day, shortly after the unwelcome news of the farm had been brought to her, Mr. Barnes called Mabel on the telephone. She listened intently for the customary announcement of a business dinner at the club.

"What do you say to dining at Florio's tonight?" he asked.

"Why —" she hesitated, — "if it would be a pleasure to you."

"I think you would enjoy it," he replied. "Does n't it do a bookworm good sometimes to

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crawl up among the bright lights and the music?"

"Perhaps," she answered coolly. "You know I have n't much taste for those things."

"All right. Then I'll be home in time to dress."

He hung up without giving her a chance to speak further, and she replaced the receiver with a sigh and spoke through a tube to the cook, telling her that they were going to dine out.

At any rate, it was better than going to one of those awful dinners with James's friends, where the talk was all domestic stupidity and she was obliged to smile above her desperate boredom while the interminable minutes dragged by. Florio's was the most expensive and fashionable restaurant in town. She sighed again. She must decide upon a gown to wear.

The drapery of her blue velvet had pulled down. It would have to be rearranged. Dull but undeniable fact. It was the most practicable gown for the purpose; so she threw it over her arm and proceeded to the nursery.

She had always found Camilla ready and willing to help her. To be sure, the little woman never said discriminately pretty things as Mademoiselle had done; she was probably too

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modest as well as too stupid for that, but she had a practical turn which had already made itself felt for good in the house, and Mabel was quite certain that Bessie, who used to look after the linen when it returned from the laundry, never now took any care of it.

When she entered the nursery she found Camilla sitting by a window, through which streamed the last half-hour of sunlight for that day. In front of her was a large workbasket full of stockings which she was darning.

As his stepmother entered, Junior, who was standing in the middle of the room gazing around the walls, cried out:—

“Don’t scare her! Don’t scare her!”

“Don’t scare who?” inquired Mrs. Barnes, looking about.

“The fairy Popinjay. See her? See her?” The child pointed to a round, quivering sunbeam on the wall, which even as he spoke dashed up to the ceiling, as Camilla smiled and laid her scissors on the window sill. “She lives in the sun,” explained Junior; “but she likes to come down here and play with me; and sometimes I make a block house for her.”

“How nice,” said Mabel absently. “Camilla, will you hook this gown on me and see if you

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can tack up the drapery? I have to go out to dinner with Mr. Barnes."

Camilla rose at once and her visitor slipped off her kimono and put on the festal gown.

"Perhaps you did n't know I was a dressmaker," said Camilla as she fastened the hooks.

"Well, that's lucky, for I'm so dull about all that sort of thing."

The speaker's mind reverted to the days when she had groaned in the throes of "making over."

"Only a village dressmaker," said Camilla; "but I think I can see where the tacking was and fix it up all right again."

"Come down, Popinjay! Come down," Junior was meanwhile apostrophizing the bright beam that had flown to the ceiling.

"Let her stay up there while there's company," said Camilla, while Mrs. Barnes talked on, giving directions and unheeding anything but her own reflection in the mirror.

"There's one place there you must rip," she said. "I sewed it myself in desperation the last time I wore the gown, and did it wrong."

Camilla went to the window and taking up her scissors returned to the dresser.

"There!" exclaimed Junior. "Popinjay's

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gone! I knew she would. She's afraid of Mama-bel."

As no one replied to him, he began stamping up and down the room.

"Oh, Junior, do keep still for a minute," exclaimed Mrs. Barnes. "Right on that seam, Camilla. Oh, what a nuisance clothes are. Junior, stop that roaring at once"; for the boy was cheering his boredom by guttural howls.

Camilla looked over her shoulder at her charge. "Hush, Junior. Listen. Popinjay is n't afraid of anything; you know that; but she only comes where Love is. Sing to her and see if she won't come back."

To Mrs. Barnes's surprise the child at once sat down on the floor with his back to them and, regarding the wall, began Camilla's song:—

"An angel flew downward from heaven's gate
And came to the earth below."

His stepmother looked over her shoulder at him while Camilla deftly caught up the velvet in the right spot, and when she had fastened it with a pin, preparatory to the sewing, she took the scissors back and laid them on the workbasket.

Instantly the sunbeam sprang to the wall and quivered before Junior's pleased eyes.

"There she is, there she is!" he cried.

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"Sing to her a little more. See how she likes it," said Camilla, taking her needle and silk; and the child remained sitting, and singing in his high, breathy little voice. Mabel listened, somewhat amused, but making the most of the time of peace in which to make certain that the job in hand was properly performed.

"Thank you, Camilla; you're quite skillful," she said at last. "I'll run away and leave Popinjay — both popinjays — in possession."

She laughed and caught up her kimono, and Junior's voice died away as he looked at her over his shoulder.

"See you in the morning," she said, blowing him a kiss; but he looked back at the wall, well satisfied. This room contained his world.

"Could n't you throw Mamabel a kiss?" asked Camilla, going back to her stocking-basket and taking up the scissors.

"Why?" asked Junior, gazing delightedly at the gyrations of Popinjay, as she leaped from flower to bird on the wall paper.

"Because we want to express love to everybody."

Junior laughed. The sunbeam fairy had taught him how. "Popinjay is n't polite to be so glad Mamabel's gone, is she?" he asked.

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"No, indeed. Now sit still, Popinjay, and Junior will tell you how Love and nothing else brings happiness; and Love is politeness and kindness and —"

"Yes," said Junior, interrupting the discourse to which the sunbeam was paying immovable attention, "but—but, you see, Mamabel does n't care."

Camilla sighed silently, and as she snipped off the darning-cotton, Popinjay danced with abandon.

CHAPTER XIII

IN THE RESTAURANT

WHEN Mr. and Mrs. Barnes entered the fashionable restaurant, Mabel felt some surprise at the number of persons who greeted her husband as they passed among the tables, and he was conscious of the attention attracted by his young wife.

The head waiter addressed him respectfully by name and indicated a table reserved in a desirable location.

Mabel glanced at her husband as they took their seats, with some personal approval. She was not sure that he did not look rather distinguished in his evening clothes. For the second time in their acquaintance she felt some elation that she had not married a cipher; and what mattered it to her that his friends were old fogies? She had no social ambitions and would have been far more impatient with a necessity to live up or down to the standards of most of the women she saw at the tables about her.

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A handsome woman, showily gowned, now recognized her husband with much *empressement*.

"Who's that?" asked Mabel surprised.

"An actress I used to know. She left the stage to marry a New York man."

The lady was continuing to smile in inviting fashion and Mr. Barnes, excusing himself, went across and shook hands with her and was presented to her companion. As Mabel watched this man rise, and saw the two shake hands, there occurred to her the first speculation that had ever entered her mind concerning James Barnes's five years of widowerhood. She had never had sufficient interest to ask him a question and he had volunteered nothing. He had been less than forty-five when his wife died, and he looked now as young as the husband of the actress. Mabel considered these things listlessly; but later when the waiter came to remove the second course of their dinner, something occurred which banished all listlessness. A couple passed their table searching for their own, and the lady, seeing Mr. Barnes, stopped short and held out her hand with great cordiality. He rose and grasped it while Mabel's face flushed with pleasure.

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"Mrs. Walmsley!" she exclaimed.

"You'll think me the dullest woman in the world, Mr. Barnes," said the newcomer, looking up into his face with charming grace of manner, "but never did I connect Mrs. James Barnes, the clever baby member of our club, with you. I've been back such a short time and no one happened to tell me. I was just about to send you my card and see if we could n't begin where we left off, but —" she laughed and took Mabel's hand — "but I see while the cat was away, you've been playing. You remember my Ben, don't you?" A tall, good-looking youth of twenty-five stepped forward and greeted his mother's friends. He had kept admiring eyes fixed on Mabel. "I saw your daughter last week, Mr. Barnes," he said; and nodding pleasantly the two passed on.

"Why did n't you tell me you knew Mrs. Walmsley?" asked Mabel.

"I suppose for the same reason that you did n't tell me you knew her," returned James Barnes.

"She's such a clever woman," went on Mabel, regarding her husband with new interest and curiosity, seeing that the clever widow, an ex-president of her club, had remembered him after

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her year of study abroad with sufficient interest to desire to renew the friendship.

"Neither of us thought the fact would interest the other, I suppose," continued James Barnes.

As Mabel resumed her dinner, the simile Mrs. Walmsley had used of the cat and the mice dwelt in her mind.

"Just to think of it," she said to herself. "Just to think of it. I wonder what she used to talk about with him." She looked up consideringly at her husband as if seeing a new nimbus about his scrupulously brushed hair.

"I came away in such a hurry," said Mr. Barnes, "that I did n't take time to look in on Junior. I suppose he's all right."

"Oh, yes; I was in the nursery a while this afternoon. Camilla's a good little thing, but she'll make a perfect molly-coddle of the boy before it's time for him to go to school. I must be looking about for some one more advantageous, and not waste too much of his time."

"It has never seemed to occur to you, Mabel," said James Barnes pleasantly, "that there are other considerations in the world beside book learning."

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"None that make such returns, however," was the quick response.

Her husband laughed a little. "You're just sporting in Elysian fields, are n't you?" he said, and young men at a neighboring table, watching Mabel and seeing his expression of entertainment, grumbled that it was these middle-aged duffers that always had all the luck.

"I'm certainly making up for lost time," returned his wife. "As Junior grows and develops I can be of some help to him."

"But if he should fail to grow up for lack of help now, your good intentions toward him might come to nothing, and what a pity that would be!"

Mabel shrugged her shoulders. "Oh, I understand those absurd worries of yours, and I think Camilla is very good for the child's body. She seems to understand warding off those agonizing tantrums; but it's his mind I'm thinking about."

"Flowers need the sunshine," remarked her husband, his eyes on his plate, "and children are n't very different."

"She's teaching him to sing," said Mabel. "It's too comical to hear him; but the exercise is good for his lungs."

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James Barnes laughed again, and again the young fellows at the next table envied him his dark-browed charmer.

"Yes, I believe it is said to be," he answered. "As soon as I make things habitable at the farm I mean to have them go out there and stay."

"I don't know. Camilla's quite useful to me, right at home," remarked Mabel doubtfully.

"I suspect it's a trick of hers," returned her husband, "but you'll have to get more out of Bessie. Elaine will be home soon, too. I was going to ask you if you'd like to go to New York with me next week and bring her home."

Mabel looked up with the slight frown of apprehension which always showed in her smooth forehead at the first symptom of a request from her husband.

"Oh, that's hardly worth while, is it, James? You'll not stay long."

"No," he returned; "but women, I notice, usually like to see New York once a year."

"Yes, I know they do; but it would be only to go and turn right round and come back again and I'm so interested in some research work I'm doing at the public library. You must give me credit, James," Mabel added, as her husband kept silence, "for some good points. I care so

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little for clothes and jewels and entertaining and all the things which most women married to a man of your means would spend money for. You have n't an extravagant wife."

She made the statement with an arch nod, smiling at her husband in self-complacence with so much effect that the masculine admirers at the next table trod on each other's feet.

"No," agreed James Barnes, eating busily. "Your extravagance lies not in expenditure, but in wastefulness."

"What!" exclaimed his wife in surprise. "You mean because I'm not a thrifty house-keeper? We might save a few hundreds, of course, if I kept my attention more on domestic matters; and, of course, if you were a poor man, it would be my duty." Mabel spoke defensively. "As it is, from my standpoint the wastefulness would be in spending time in that direction."

James Barnes nodded. "I did n't refer to bread and meat," he said quietly.

"Then what did you mean?" Mabel asked it imperiously.

"It would be of no use to try to tell you. You have n't studied the language."

The wife stared at her husband for a moment of silence.

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"Tell me what you mean, at once. What have I done?"

"Nothing." James Barnes smiled at the comprehensiveness of the word.

"I insist, James," said Mabel, ceasing to eat. "I'm quick at languages, I think. I believe I can understand you if you'll tell me what's on your mind."

He looked up at her, still smiling, and the remote look in the eyes which used to question her favor so eagerly filled her with the discomfort of the consciously admirable when admiration is not forthcoming.

"There, there, my dear," he said soothingly. "I made a slip of the tongue. Let it go at that."

"I shall not let it go. I have a right to know what you mean. You said I was wasteful."

"Yes; but I retract, from your standpoint. What is waste to one person may be only the elimination of superfluity to another. It's merely a question of values."

Mrs. Barnes kept silence and her thoughts moved quickly, searching here and there. Looking at her husband, scales seemed to fall from her eyes. A warm flush of discomfort, almost of alarm, stole over her, for the look in his eyes as

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she met them now was the regard which might have fallen on his office boy. How long had the change existed?

"Why did you bring me here to-night?" she asked at last.

"Why, I was rather tired of our dining-room."

"You've not been in it nearly as much as I have," she returned quickly.

"True. I should think you might be tired of it, too."

His tone was courteous. The politeness of it stung her. Resentment was melting in mortification. She had no wish to lose ground with her husband. Very well, she must regain it. She began again to eat.

"What day are you going to get Elaine?" she asked.

"Next Wednesday."

"Why, I would n't mind going if it would be the least pleasure to you."

"No, I really don't care anything about it. As you say, it would be a very short, unsatisfactory trip."

The sincerity of the careless reply hurt in Mabel's new sensitiveness.

"I wonder if we shall see a change in her," she

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remarked, her heart moving a little faster as she endeavored to speak easily.

"Oh, I'm certain of it," replied James Barnes. "Her letters show that. I only hope her humble father will not be too much awed in her society."

Mabel smiled obligingly, but with effort. "Have you told her about the farm yet?" she asked.

In her hasty, vigorous mental search for causes, she had decided that in her strictures on her husband's purchase she had made a deep wound.

"No, I'm going to break that to her gently," he replied. "I'm hoping she'll take kindly to the idea, for I can use a woman's taste in my changes out there."

"Why —" began Mabel, looking up quickly; but she met his eyes and paused. That blankly polite gaze was horrible; and how could she finish such a banal question?

"I want to see the farm, James," she said. Suddenly no amends seemed too much.

"Nothing more easy," he replied carelessly. "There's the motor or the railroad, either."

"When will you take me?"

Her husband shook his head. "Don't rely

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on me. I'm running the farm at arm's length. I'm pretty busy these days."

The apprehensive flush that again ran over his companion made her hand tremble. There was something else that he was holding at arm's length.

"But I'd much rather go with you," she said, strangely frightened.

"Oh, no, you would n't," he returned lightly. "You'll be freer to think and say what you please alone or with Victor. Victor is out there a good deal. You might go with him if you really find you have time."

The barrier which the pleasant words revealed became more visible. To get behind it seemed at this moment the most important thing on earth to Mabel.

"I don't care anything about going without you, James," she said.

He saw the appeal and incredulity in her eyes, but they did not affect him. He had learned too well what were her genuine interests.

"Suit yourself," he returned. His pleasant, indifferent voice struck on her ears like a knell. Her charm for him was gone! It was incredible.

"I should think," she said with desperate

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frankness, "that if I ask you to take me you would."

He shook his head slightly and smiled. "That is one of many things you think which are mistakes."

Her eyes filled with tears. What were her clubs to her at the present moment! She glanced over at the table where Mrs. Walmsley was laughing with her boy. She had a wild impulse to run over to her and beg her to make peace between her husband and herself! to teach her how to break down that adamantine barrier.

"Common courtesy, James" — she began nervously.

Still he smiled at her coolly. "That's one of the things we've wasted," he returned.

She had! She admitted it with a beating heart. Had she not ridden rough-shod over his opinions and feelings? Well, supposing she had! What did she want of him? What had she ever wanted of him? She could n't turn into some one else to please him. Perhaps she had been thoughtless, discourteous, but honest, always honest. He was leaning back in his chair now, and looking about the room while the waiter brought the finger bowls.

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Catching Mrs. Wàlmsley's eye he nodded and smiled in response to her friendly gesture. Mabel envied her with sudden passion because James Barnes had nothing against her.

Her wastefulness. Her ignorance of the language in which her husband would have to explain. She looked back in amazement at the complacency with which she had entered this room; for reason as her pride might, she knew at this moment that her husband's kindness, poise, and strength had won her through all those months when she had used him as a means to an end in which he had no share. Was it too late? Was there really nothing left but ashes? This she asked herself as she dipped her fingers in the crystal bowl, and color glowed in her cheek.

As her husband regarded her he thought he had never seen her so handsome.

"And what now?" he asked. "Shall we go to the theater? I suppose you've seen 'Ghosts.'"

"Yes," returned Mabel. "I've seen 'Ghosts.' If you don't mind, James, I'd like to go home."

He saw her agitation and suspected that she was undergoing some awakening. He had no wish that she should suffer even that superficial discomfort to her pride which was evident.

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"Let me tell you something, Mabel," he said, leaning across the table and speaking impressively, while the orchestra began the strains of "Madam Butterfly." "I was brought up to think it a poor plan to wear mourning. I was very grateful to you for lightening your black as soon as you did for my sake. Now, let's make a compact that in the ups and downs of our life we won't wear mourning. Things that we care for die and are buried—" She lifted her eyes to him piteously, and he gave her an encouraging nod — "Let's plant flowers over them and see nothing but the flowers. Agreed?"

She bit her lip. "Let's go home," she said. "I'll let Dick take you, then, since you don't care to go anywhere. I'll go back to the office and finish up a little matter that will make things easier to-morrow."

"Will things be easier to-morrow?" asked Mabel, scarcely conscious of what she was saying.

He smiled at her with good cheer. "They don't need to be any easier for me," he remarked. "'I'm just as happy as a big sunflower,' to quote the poets."

They rose from the table and in a sort of

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daze Mabel followed him among the tables and out of the room, the strenuous strains of "Madam Butterfly" sounding in her ears.

He put her into the motor and said good-night.

"Of course, you're going to drive to the office?" she protested.

"Did you observe the dinner I ate, my dear?" he returned. "I need to walk." Laughingly he closed the door and his wife sank back among the cushions which nine months ago had been presented to a poor girl, tired of poverty.

She stared straight before her. What had happened? Nothing to deprive James of his appetite. He had, indeed, eaten a hearty dinner and enjoyed it. He was "just as happy as a big sunflower." Then why should n't she be? She knew that any other evening since their marriage had they dined out and her husband closed the door of the motor and sent her home alone, she would have welcomed the situation with relief as giving her so much more free time to pursue her own interests.

What was the matter? Did she grudge him his contentment since he had not robbed her of her own?

But he had robbed her, her heart cried out in sharp pain. He had called her wasteful, igno-

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rant. He had let her see that he admired her no more than she admired him. It was a bolt from the blue, shriveling her careless self-esteem. She remembered Victor's exasperated comments, and recalled vividly something he said to her as he was leaving on the night that James Barnes told them of the purchase of the farm.

"Look out, Mabel," Victor had said, "you're overdoing it. Your husband won't hear a word of criticism of you. I know, for I've tried my best and been soundly snubbed for my pains. You happen to have married the biggest man I ever knew."

She had smiled at him patronizingly, well pleased to hear that his impertinence had been properly dealt with. Now she shrank into the corner of the limousine, her eyes staring before her. She had overdone it, whatever "it" might be, but why be so miserable? Why feel that anything irrevocable had occurred? And if it had, what then? It was only James Barnes, the grain dealer, who was concerned. A man twenty years her senior and father of two most unpleasant children; a self-made man who had never had advantages. What was this strange yearning of the heart for a man to whom her brain condescended? Could it be possible that

In the Restaurant

she was so puerile as to be affected by his presentableness in his evening clothes, by the deference with which he had been addressed in the restaurant, even by such a considerable honor as intimacy with Mrs. Walmsley?

No, she knew it was not that; and as she reviewed with new eyes the cold comfort of her husband's home and the part she had played in it, she knew that the revelation of his disappointments and the manner in which he had borne them had suddenly reversed their positions. She had been on a pedestal, and while he knelt at her feet she had carelessly thrown him crumbs.

Now he was on a pedestal. With a rising in her throat and tears in her eyes, she felt herself at his feet. Would he throw her crumbs? She feared he had none to throw. With him it would be giving all; and when repulsed sufficiently often, there would be nothing left to give.

Her eyes were blinded when she left the motor.

"Are you going back for Mr. Barnes?" she asked the chauffeur, and even he noticed the strangeness of her tone.

"No. Mr. Barnes said he would n't want the car again."

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"Good-night, Dick," returned the lady, and went up the steps.

The chauffeur glanced after her, suspecting tears. "Queer. They did n't seem to be scrap-ping," he reflected curiously.

CHAPTER XIV

AS OTHERS SEE US

MABEL entered the house with her latchkey. Some impulse made her pass through the dim hall to her husband's den. It was a room she seldom entered and she turned on the light and looked about her. It was orderly. She remembered that he liked order. The ashes on the hearth were swept carefully together; but there was no fire laid. When she was first married, this room had worn an atmosphere of liveableness. Now, with its neatly folded papers on the desk and the leather armchairs and divan all set back near the wall, it had a deserted aspect. The wife wondered when last James Barnes had spent an evening here. She glanced at the bound volumes of magazines, and books on farming. Impulsively she pulled two of the chairs toward the fireplace, and sitting down in one of them, looked at the other. Its arms were rubbed where his hands had rested. She looked at the cold fireplace, and the heap of ashes.

The wood basket was full, and kindling stood near. She pulled off her gloves, and, kneeling

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down in her blue velvet gown, she laid a generous fire, and finding matches on the mantelpiece, set light to it.

"If he is n't very late it will still be alive when he comes in," she thought, and she left the chair standing before it.

Then she went upstairs, her thoughts still seething.

She entered her own well-lighted study and regarded the long full shelves with alien eyes. The table was piled with tossed magazines and books, some left open on their faces. Ashes again in the fireplace; but ashes strewn; and flecks and rills of ashes on the rug. The open desk revealed a seeming chaos; but chaos that she had loved and understood. Bessie's brush and duster were forbidden in this sanctum save for periodical cleanings which its mistress literally suffered.

She strode to the desk and quickly pulled down the lid. A sob caught in her throat. How James Barnes must have hated this room. His self-control could not be learned in books. His generosity was not taught there; nor his chivalry; nor his patience. Mabel had a sufficiently logical mind for all these things to gain their right places and values when she was once

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started on an affirmative instead of a defensive line of thought.

She had lost all charm for him. This room was largely the cause of its waste. She suddenly hated it; and, turning off the light, stood there in the dark, thinking, thinking. She had spent his money as freely and carelessly as she had wasted his love. Oh, how dreary everything was with the background gone. The background had been James Barnes's love. She had thrown it away. She remembered the biting words, "eliminating superfluity."

More than anything else she was conscious of loneliness — intense loneliness. Perhaps he had suffered like this. Yes, and more; for he had expected more. No! No man can suffer as much as a woman, was her passionate denial. He is a free and independent creature and has a hundred resources to a woman's one; and then had he not declared himself happy? Deepest sting of all. Happy! But an innervoice reminded her. With her motor, her latchkey, her unhampered bank account, what freedom had she lacked?

Like hunted creatures her harassed thoughts flew hither and thither for a sign of comfort.

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Suddenly she remembered. There was a person in this house whom James respected instead of despising; actively liked and approved instead of courteously ignoring. She could not be jealous of insignificant little Camilla Lovett, but she could be envious of her, passionately envious. It would be a comfort to see her, to speak to a harmless, kindly creature on whom James Barnes looked with interest.

Mabel hastened out of her room and down the corridor to the nursery. It was nearly nine o'clock, but it seemed to her it must be midnight. Only two hours since she and her husband had entered that restaurant. It was incredible. Those two hours balanced her whole life.

To her surprise and disappointment, Junior was awake. He lay there in bed watching Camilla in her kimono brushing her hair.

"Are n't we late birds?" said Camilla as Mrs. Barnes came in. "The days are so long the time ran away with us."

The little woman's happy face and voice as she turned to greet the newcomer made her seem to the wife like a creature from another planet.

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"I think I shall go to bed early myself," said Mabel, with an effort at lightness. "Will you come to my room and unhook me? Mr. Barnes has often suggested my having a personal maid, but somehow I never wanted one."

It gave her solace to mention this instance of her husband's solicitude.

"I'll be glad to," returned Camilla.

"No, no," exclaimed Junior.

His stepmother looked at him. Already in these few weeks there was color in the face against the pillow.

She advanced to the bedside. Junior had seldom seen her in evening dress and he looked at her now with a sort of aloof appreciation. In her blue velvet gown with that white lace about her bare throat, and her large hat, she looked very handsome and the child thought so; but she was only Mamabel just the same; a creature of no interest except that in all their encounters she was sure to antagonize him.

"Won't you lend Camilla to me a little while?" she asked.

It was an extraordinary speech in an extraordinary tone, and the child dimly felt it. She had never looked at him like this, either.

"Of course he will," declared Camilla cheer-

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fully. "He's learning what is the only way to be happy."

Junior frowned and thumped the pillow.

"But some would not hark to the angel's lay," said Camilla, as she braided her curly mane.

"Their earth songs they loved the best!" roared Junior, thumping his pillow again; "and I do, too," he finished mutinously.

Camilla came over to the bed and stooping whispered to him.

"I don't care," he answered loudly.

"Oh, yes, you do. Now, let her in, let her in," she said warningly. "You know what will happen if you don't. Here's a chance to do Mamabel a kindness. Are n't you glad?"

"She does n't do me any kindnesses," pouted Junior.

The words fell cuttingly on his stepmother's laden heart. She sat down on the edge of Camilla's bed and regarded the child with wide eyes. "I'm sorry you have to say that, Junior. Camilla is trying to make you kinder than I am, is n't she?"

The little boy was surprised at this speech; but grown-up people were tricky and his stepmother wanted to get Camilla away from him.

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He sulked in silence and she added, still keeping the sorrowful gaze on him:—

“What did Camilla mean by telling you to let her in? Let whom in?”

“Oh, an old angel,” replied Junior after a pause.

“Tell me about her, please, dear, will you?”

Mamabel was in earnest. Perhaps if she wore beautiful clothes and had her hair fixed smooth all the time, she might be a more agreeable member of society. However, her stepson did not feel expansive.

“Oh,” he began grudgingly, “she’s only an angel that flies all around, trying to find somebody that wants her.”

“Tell Mamabel her name,” said Camilla, going back to the dresser and beginning on the other braid.

“I don’t remember,” returned the child, his lips snapping together.

“Why, Junior Barnes,” laughed Camilla, turning around and looking at him. “I did n’t think any boy would deny his best friend. What will Popinjay say to-morrow when I tell her?”

“Perhaps she won’t come,” returned Junior. “Perhaps it’ll be cloudy and she’ll have to stay in the sun and keep dry.”

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"No, the stars are all out to-night and I'm sure she'll come," said Camilla. "Now, then, out with the name of your best friend."

"Camilla," replied Junior promptly, and he joined in his best friend's infectious laugh.

The regal lady in the velvet gown looked and listened hungrily. Last night she would have fled from this nursery talk to something worth while.

"If you knew how much I really want to know about the angel, Junior, you'd tell me," she said. "What was her name, dear? Please tell me."

Mamabel was in earnest. Junior, glancing up at her suspiciously under his lashes, saw it.

"Oh, her name was Love," he remarked, with a careless upward inflection.

"And she was flying around, did you say? and she was singing?" Mamabel's unsmiling lips and eyes were entreating.

"Yep."

"What about, dear? Singing about what?"

"Unselfishness," returned Junior airily.

"And — and, did you say —"

This interest was truly flattering. Junior was not proof against it.

"Yes; she flew all around, and lots of people

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would n't listen to her, 'cause they liked their own songs best."

"And what were their songs?"

"Selfishness. All about selfishness. They just loved it. So they put up bars and would n't let her in; so she flew away, and she was 'most tired out when she found a boy that thought she looked pretty good; so he said, 'Come in, if you want to, and sit down'; so she hurried right in and folded her wings and sat down and — and — she lived with him all the time except" — the child cast a glance toward Camilla — "except —" he said slowly again.

And Camilla, brushing a curl around her finger, took up the word.

"Except once in a long while when the boy forgot what were the things that the angel could n't live with, and he would frighten her away for a little while; but he always called her back, because his heart was such a cold, empty place without the angel in it. He could n't bear it."

The eyes of the listener were stinging.

"It's a song," said Junior, tossing the information to the blue velvet figure who sat so attentively with hands tightly interlaced.

"Will you sing it?" asked Mamabel.

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"No," Junior yawned prodigiously. "I'm too—" No, he must not admit sleepiness. "Camilla can sing it," he added.

"Will she?" Mabel turned toward the little figure in the blue kimono, who shook her head deprecatingly; but for the first time Camilla realized that the mistress of the house looked pale; that this lingering in the nursery indicated something unusual.

She came to the bedside, smiling at the sleepy boy. "I'm too little to sing in such a bright light," she said deprecatingly, and turned off all the electric lights except the one at the head of the bed, which had been softened with a rose-colored screen.

It was as easy for Camilla to sing as to breathe; so she sat down at the head of her bed while Mabel sat at the foot, and sang the song through.

When she finished, Junior's hand had relaxed as it lay outside the counterpane. He was fast asleep.

"That's the last of him till morning," remarked Camilla, rising.

"Does n't he have nightmares any more?" asked Mabel, gazing at her companion.

"Never," returned Camilla cheerfully.

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“How wonderful!”

“Oh, no,” smiled Camilla. “The nightmares were the wonderful things.”

“How happy you are!” exclaimed Mabel, still regarding her.

“Indeed, I am. Shall we go to your room now, Mrs. Barnes?”

Mabel rose silently and led the way through her study to the adjoining bedroom. It occurred to her as she went how long it was since her husband had taken this path. She tried to think how long, but could not be sure in the confusion of her thoughts. It was certainly many weeks.

“Why, I turned on the light here,” said Camilla, surprised to find the study dark.

“Yes, I turned it off,” returned Mabel, and Camilla wondered silently.

She switched on the light in the bedroom and Mabel took off the becoming hat, and Camilla unhooked the festal gown.

“Shall I bring you a kimono?” she asked, as she took the gown to the closet.

“No. I’m not going to read to-night. Perhaps I’ve been using my eyes too much. They hurt me.”

Caution had overtaken her. Why should she

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let this outsider know that she was groveling at the foot of a pedestal?

"You do sit up pretty late, don't you?" returned Camilla.

"Yes; it makes me clip off the early part of the day. It is n't a very good habit, and it is n't just right to Mr. Barnes." She must speak about him. She must speak his name lightly to one who did not know that he despised her.

"He has taken his breakfasts with Junior of late," said Camilla. "I turned my room into a sitting-room as long as I don't sleep in it, and we have breakfast there. So he has slipped into the way of having his breakfast sent up there, too."

A pang went through Mabel and she tried to laugh.

"Oh, then, even if I did turn over a new leaf, it would n't do any good," she answered. "There is n't room for four to have breakfast in that tiny place."

In spite of her light tone, Camilla still saw the speaker's pallor and she thought her lip trembled.

"Oh, Junior is getting quite old enough to have breakfast with you and his father in the dining-room if you were to come down. I suppose we shall soon be going out to the country,

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but in the fall you will probably start in that way."

There was a hearty note in Camilla's voice that was comforting.

"Why not in the country?" returned Mabel, beginning to take down her hair. "You speak as if I were not going to the farm."

"I did n't know," said Camilla, certain now that she was in the presence of suffering.

"Shan't I brush your hair, Mrs. Barnes? I believe you're tired to-night."

She drew forward a chair in front of the dresser and Mabel sat down in it, relieved of the fear that Camilla would say good-night and go, since she had no excuse to detain her.

"Did n't know?" echoed Mabel with dignity as Camilla began to unbraid the dark coronet which always surmounted the small head. "Would n't I be likely to go where my husband goes?"

"Yes, if you liked to," answered Camilla, heeding the pain and not the rebuke.

"Well," Mabel forced a laugh, "you're not very complimentary."

"I only meant that Mr. Barnes likes you to follow your inclinations and you did n't seem to care for the country."

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"Oh, you mean because of the way I took the news that he had bought the farm? To tell the truth, I'm quite ashamed of that, Camilla. It was — frightfully unsympathetic and not at all the way I should have spoken."

"It's a lovely place," said Camilla in her calm, even tones, "but seedy, and run down and overgrown for lack of money and care. Not at all the way it looked when I was a little girl."

"Oh, you remember it, don't you?" returned Mabel with a sad note of eagerness; "and you knew my husband when he was a little boy?"

"I don't remember him except as a very big boy, always kind and good to troublesome little Camilla Lovett."

"I'm sure he was. His kindness is very deep, is n't it, Camilla? If he even had an enemy and the enemy made proper reparation and wished to be friends, Mr. Barnes would never hold out; don't you think so?"

"I should wish to think so," answered Camilla; and now she was sure. The inevitable climax had come. She brushed the long hair steadily and avoided the wide eyes in the mirror.

"Why do you speak that way? Are n't you perfectly sure?"

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"How could I be?"

"Knowing him as well as we both do, I am sure. I don't think it's just to him not to be sure. I should think you'd be ashamed to doubt him, Camilla."

Camilla brushed away, but did not speak. Mabel felt a wild desire to jump up and shake words out of that exasperatingly serene face.

"Now, take a little thing," she went on, "like my rudeness about the farm. I was rude. I admit it. My brother scolded me; but I intend to make up for it. I'm going out there and going to take the greatest interest. I want you to suggest anything that I can do to help along the changes and improvements."

"That will be fine," said Camilla.

"And, of course, such a big nature as Mr. Barnes's would n't lay up against me a mistake like that!"

The word brought to her pain-stricken heart another blighting sentence of the awful evening: "That is one of many things you think which are mistakes."

Oh, this was n't a mistake. It could n't be. Camilla must speak. The wife tried to catch her eye in the mirror, and failing turned quickly around and looked up.

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"You know he would n't, don't you? You think I was outrageous. I see you do; but still, even so, you think he'd forgive such an offense in me and much, much greater ones, don't you?"

Camilla looked down into the wretched eyes and felt great compassion.

"I think Mr. Barnes would forgive any one offense," she said gently.

"What do you mean? What are you thinking? Speak right out — what is in your mind?"

"I should be very sorry to say the wrong thing," said Camilla. "I don't know you well enough to venture, Mrs. Barnes. You might not understand my language."

Again that expression. What language was this of which she was ignorant? Could her husband and this old friend communicate thoughts which would exclude her? She looked back to the mirror and grew very white; and her hands locked together to conceal their trembling.

This little, insignificant woman, who could speak neither French, German, Italian, nor Spanish, and whose ignorance she had tolerated in the house, knew a language her husband believed his wife incapable of learning. After the

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recent experience in the nursery she had a suspicion that her stepson was learning it.

She remembered, for her mind to-night was like a sensitized plate, that Camilla had remarked that he was learning what was the only way to be happy. She would have dismissed the remark once as a bit of probable Methodism, to be expected in the narrow horizon of a little woman with a curved back, from a country town.

The only way to be happy! What more did any one need to know? She herself had wanted it hungrily and gone after it without a look to the right or left, secure in her vanity from any obstruction in her triumphant march. A great shock had awakened her, and she had come to herself, and looking about saw only ashes; tasted only ashes.

She looked up at Camilla, poised, serene, her brow calm under her waving hair. It was a Madonna face, Mabel thought. All her defenses broke down suddenly. She turned around and caught her companion's busy hands in hers.

"Camilla," she said tearlessly, "I am absolutely miserable!"

CHAPTER XV

THE FAMISHED HEART

CAMILLA nodded down at the lifted white face.

"You had to learn the hard way, did n't you?" she said tenderly.

"What do you mean? There is n't any other way in this awful world."

"Yes, there's another way."

"What way?"

"To see and acknowledge the truth."

"Oh, of course. If I had n't been blind, I should have seen long ago that I was making a mistake, if that's what you mean. You've seen it, Camilla. I suppose you've seen it ever since you came into the house." Mabel dropped the hands to which she had been clinging and turned back to the mirror, avoiding her own miserable reflection. "No doubt you are glad I'm being punished," she finished bitterly.

"No, dear Mrs. Barnes. I'm glad your eyes are opened, that's all."

"I had never had anything I wanted; and when the chance came I took it. A little happi-

The Famished Heart

ness, and then I'm punished like this! I wish I'd never been born; or else that I might have had a disposition like yours. Nothing ever ruffles you."

"Born like me?" returned Camilla, mechanically brushing the long hair again. "Poor, sick, and with this round back which cut me off from many joys in the lot of other girls! You may be sure I have suffered."

Mabel recollected what her husband had told her of the once acid disposition and sharp tongue of this woman. She had listened carelessly, not sharing his interest in the transformation. What was there for such a negligible individual except to get religion; and that was evidently what Camilla had done, or she would not be teaching Junior songs about angels.

"I tried to get comfort out of study, too," went on Camilla. "I learned to speak better than my neighbors, and spent hours over history and mathematics; but all that left my hunger unsatisfied."

"Not so with me," declared Mabel. "All I asked was my books, my study, my interchange of thought with other intellectual people."

"Was it all you asked? Is it?" questioned

The Right Track

Camilla quietly. "You have it still, have n't you?"

"Of course not. All satisfaction is gone now that I know that it has made my husband unhappy!"

"Is he — unhappy?"

The dark eyes, wet with pain, lifted to the reflection of the Madonna face. Camilla had pressed an open wound; but apparently she was unconscious of it, though she did not meet the miserable eyes.

"Does he seem happy to you?" Mabel locked her hands together as she asked the crucial question, which should settle in her mind that her husband had not been playing a part for her punishment.

"Very," returned Camilla tranquilly. "For a time I believe he was a good deal worried about Junior; but he is relieved now. I'm sure if your life contents you, he wishes you to pursue it."

"Stop brushing my hair," said Mabel chokingly. "You have suffered. I should think you would have some pity on me."

She seized her hair in both hands and swept it over her shoulder and began to braid it with trembling fingers.

The Famished Heart

Camilla's hands dropped. "I have great pity for you, Mrs. Barnes," she returned slowly.

"Pretended pity!" said Mabel. "You love to torture me by doubting that my husband will forgive my mistakes and be willing to begin over again."

"There, you see," said Camilla. "Your books do not satisfy you. You think it is Mr. Barnes's approval that you want for your satisfaction; but even that would n't do. It is the approval of your own conscience that you really need."

Her voice was gentle and sincere and Mabel's need was great.

"You think, then, that if I change — become a good housekeeper and a good mother to his children, he will love me again?"

"Dear Mrs. Barnes, we can't look to the prize." A mother could not speak more gently to her child than Camilla now to the appealing woman.

"But that's all I do it for," cried Mabel quickly.

"Yes, I know; but the change of this feeling is what must come."

"You mean change of heart or something like that? I know you're religious, but I could never find the comfort there that you have."

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"There is n't any other comfort," returned Camilla simply.

"Do you suppose he'd care for me any more if I went to church? He does n't go himself."

"It is n't a question of going to church. The change has to be here." Camilla touched her head and heart. "The thing itself is always greater than the name of the thing."

Camilla brought a kimono and put it around the shivering figure. Then she seated herself in a neighboring chair. "Let me tell you what happened to me," she began. "I went to New York a year ago to take care of a dear little baby. I was heart-sick and soul-sick and body-sick, and I thought to have that baby in my arms would help me. It did; but better was to come. A friend of the baby's mother came to see who was taking care of the little one and she found a sallow, famished creature, doing her conscientious best, but always under a cloud of fear. The lady began to talk to me. It was the beginning."

"Of what?" Mabel's eyes were fastened upon the speaker hungrily. Never at a lecture on science or art had she given such strict attention.

"Of heaven," declared Camilla quietly, her

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Madonna eyes shining. "My god had been my enemy. He had made my back round for my good. I took some satisfaction every day in showing him that it had n't done me any good. This lady brought me to God Himself, God who is Love; or rather she did not take me to Him; she took a veil away from my eyes and slowly and happily I learned that He had been there all the time and that my false god was a creature of my own invention. God—Love—had not given me a deformed back, and wonder of wonders, He did n't even know I had one. At first I did not welcome that idea. I wanted Him to know it and pity me, and make it up to me somehow; but you know how the Bible says: 'God is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.'"

"No—no," said Mabel, as she paused. "I don't know anything. Go on."

"It was a study of many months, but the most rewarding study in the world. In the new heaven and the new earth all things were being made new before my opening eyes. I knew God. I proved his presence in countless ways. I began to be conscious that I was one of the countless creations of a perfect God who could not create imperfection; that I therefore lived in a perfect universe: his creation; that He was om-

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nipotent, so what power could evil have? that He was omnipresent, so where could evil find room? that I, one of the ideas of a loving God, expressed only love and goodness."

"Then, how about everything else?" asked Mabel quickly. "How about the evil and suffering on every hand? How about your back?"

"Belief — only ages of false belief. We're the slaves of it still; but each individual can shake off the shackles when he will. He can't do it in a minute, and neither can he say how soon or when or how it will be done; but he can rejoice on bended knees that he has found the key to life, worth all the so-called knowledge of the ages, and henceforth nothing should make him unhappy or afraid."

"But if God does n't know anything about our troubles —"

"Therein lies our safety," said Camilla earnestly: "To hold firmly to reality, to know that everything unlike God is a cheat, to put your hand in the hand of Love — perfect love that casts out fear; what a vista it opens! Truth and Love are active, not passive. They're on your side, working with you when you consciously work with them."

Mabel's breath came fast. "Of course, all that

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sounds very strange to me; and there's your back. When you're so good, if your curved spine is only a belief, why should n't that knowledge of nothing but perfection straighten it?"

Camilla smiled at the speaker happily. "It would n't surprise me any morning to wake up and find it straight," she said; "but I've ceased looking for that. It is n't my first business. My back does n't ache any more. It used to; and, Mrs. Barnes," — the speaker's voice became still more earnest, — "it has come to seem such an unimportant incident in the life of one who knows she will live to eternity in ever-unfolding consciousness of the perfection already existing."

"Then won't you talk to James about this? Perhaps we could —"

A shake of Camilla's head made Mabel pause. "You can't feed a person who is n't hungry," she replied. "You were hungry. That is why I have said all this to you. I was hungry — Oh, so hungry when it was given to me. I drank it in as parched earth drinks up water."

"No matter whether it was reasonable or not?" returned Mabel.

"Is the multiplication-table reasonable? That does n't admit of argument, does it? This

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wonderful philosophy can be proved just as surely. Hungry as I was, I should have had enough and thrown it aside within a year if it had disappointed me. It was easy for me to be bitter. I was a confirmed pessimist."

"Then hard as James is," said Mabel, persisting in her one idea, "you should be able to make him see —"

"Dear Mrs. Barnes, it's yourself you must deal with."

"But the only thing I care about accomplishing is getting back my husband's love."

Camilla shook her head, but her smile was loving. "Has n't all your trouble come from thinking only of what you wanted?"

Mabel bit her lip. "Yes," she replied at last.

"Then that's the first thing to change, is n't it?"

"Well, but I'm perfectly willing to change," pleaded Mabel. "I'm willing to get up to breakfast, and to order the meals, and look after the accounts, and see more of Junior—" She paused in the list of things which Victor had criticized; "and so I don't see why Mr. Barnes should n't forgive me."

"In other words," said Camilla, "you don't see why you should have any punishment."

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"Not according to your philosophy," returned Mabel. "If evil is unreal, why should I be punished for something James only believed was so, and was n't so at all?"

"Because you believed in it," returned Camilla, "and found your satisfaction in neglecting that list of duties you just mentioned. He is n't being punished. It's you. We suffer for every bit of belief and satisfaction we have in evil, and are blessed for every realization of its nothingness and the turning to good instead. Whether we wish to escape punishment or not, we can't, just so long as we believe in the things that incur punishment, and every form of evil, little or great, does incur it."

"What is there evil in the study of big, splendid subjects?"

"None, and you know it. You could have pursued this culture at times and seasons which would not have wounded your husband. You know that."

Camilla did not look like a Madonna to her listener at this moment. She was more like an accusing angel.

"Oh, but it's cruel —" began Mabel, and her hands flew to her face to cover excited tears. She was stirred to the depths by all this talk. "It

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hurts me terribly, Camilla, that you should n't sympathize with me," she sobbed.

"I'll sympathize with you and help you in every way in my power when you give me something to sympathize with. Self-pity, domination, self-justification will never help you a bit. I can't sympathize with them."

"Domination! What do you mean?"

"Why, you wish now to enter into your husband, as it were, and compel his forgiveness and his love. That is n't the way to get them."

"Tell me, then, what is the way!" begged the weeping woman.

"Forget your own happiness, your own longings. Turn to God, whose child you are. His wisdom is fatherly. His love is like a mother's. He'll teach you what to do. No one else can. Stop all exaction, or considering what others ought to do, and pray: 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.'"

Mabel sobbed softly. Camilla rose, and, approaching, put her arms around the shaking figure and pressed the passive dark head against her bosom.

"You say you don't know the Bible," she said

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softly. "One sentence comes to me now: 'Little children, keep yourselves from idols.'"

There was no response from the bowed head, and the quiet sobbing continued.

"You can never begin any sooner," said Camilla, "to have a splendid instead of a selfish purpose in life. Start right now. Your thoughts are all you need watch. Your actions will take care of themselves. Don't spend any time grieving over the past. You're not alone, however Mr. Barnes feels, or whatever he says or does. If you know God at all, you know He is omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient. You've been struggling after these little grains of material knowledge all this time when Omnipotence was at your side, unrecognized. When we have such a helper, how can we be discouraged? Say to yourself, over and over: 'Intelligence directs, Divine Love protects, and Mind is unfolding to me all I ought to know and to have.'"

The quiet sobbing lessened and ceased. Mabel lifted heavy eyes, and Camilla smiled down into them.

"Do you get a glimpse," she asked, "of what a glorious thing it is to live?"

Mabel looked before her in silence, but she

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was thinking; and after Camilla had said good-night, and the door had closed softly behind her, she continued to think.

Toward morning she slept a little, and woke at the sound of her husband's laugh. Junior had evidently run to greet him as he came up to the nursery breakfast. With a pang of recollection Mabel leaped out of bed and set her door ajar and her ear to the opening. Mr. Barnes was speaking.

"By the way, Bessie," she heard him say, "if you light the fire in the den in my absence, never leave it as you did last night, with no fender around it. That wood snaps. There are two holes burned in the rug. You might set the house afire."

Mabel could not hear the maid's response, but her husband's voice came distinctly:—

"Oh, you did n't, eh? I'll have to talk to Miss Lovett then. I thought it was strange the chairs were out."

The listener heard the knock on the nursery door, the entrance and closing, and she stood, her own door in hand and sick loneliness at her heart.

"Even that was wrong!" she thought; "and now he will know that I did it."

CHAPTER XVI

BEGINNING AGAIN

THE world did not stand still because Mabel Barnes had ceased to be happy. Her engagements for the day stared up at her from the calendar. The car, after taking Mr. Barnes to the office, always stood at the door, waiting for orders. She was such a busy woman that the chauffeur's position was no sinecure; but his evenings were usually his own, and being a family man, he appreciated this and made no complaint of the constant duty of the day.

The cook looked up in surprise when her mistress came into the kitchen that morning. There was some displeasure in the look, too.

"I thought I would begin to plan the meals, Katie," said Mabel, rather intimidated by her reception.

"It's dissatisfied ye are, then," was the response.

"Dissatisfied with myself, yes. I think I've left it all to you too long."

"Sure, I don't mind," returned Katie, quite sincerely. With her telephone and a grand dis-

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regard of the monthly reckoning, she wanted no interference.

"I'm going to try it awhile, anyway, Katie. I'm getting an early start this morning so as to go to market."

"To market, is it!" responded the astonished cook. "Sure, is Mr. Barnes in trouble?"

She had been queen of this kitchen before Mabel's marriage, and felt privileged to ask questions of the young lady who had so far kept her place as boarder.

"No, but I feel I want to know more about my own house. You'll have to help me, Katie. I'm very ignorant."

This speech failed to mollify the cook, who turned to the sink grumbling under her breath as she turned on the faucets and stormily filled the dishpan.

But Mabel persisted. She had her tablet of paper and her pencil with her. Katie's answers to her questions being grudging, she went herself to the icebox and thought she detected some odor.

"This must be emptied and scrubbed to-day," she said.

Katie, who had followed her, wore a countenance of amazed injury.

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"Scrubbed, is it!" she repeated, as if unable to believe her own ears. "Ladies mind their own affairs."

"This is my affair, Katie. Did you think this was your refrigerator? I don't blame you if you did."

Mrs. Barnes did not speak with any excitement. She had on her hat and her tailored gown and to Katie's eyes was a most misguided interloper.

"There's no person can tell me when my icebox needs scrubbin'," returned the cook, very red in the face; and if Mabel's heart had been lighter, she would have trembled before her. "Sure, yer husband's no poor clerk that ye need be 'tendin' on the market," added the irate woman, aghast at the prospect of having certain plans and habits of her own come to an end.

"I'm the best judge of that," returned Mabel. "Will you scrub the icebox to-day?"

"Sure, I will not, thin." Katie spoke in a scarlet rage. "Ye can suit yerself to-day, for I'm off in an hour."

"Very well," returned Mabel quietly. "You're a fine cook, Katie. I'll give you a reference if you ever want it."

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The young mistress's heart was too heavy to care who deserted her. The one essential being she had lost; nothing else mattered; but this heavy heart was not hard. Submerged under the sense of her own shortcomings, what were the peccadilloes of a careless and extravagant cook?

Katie stared at her in utter amazement. The woman who, as had often been remarked in the kitchen, refused to "lift a finger," — this woman now took the threat, so appalling to most ladies, with the utmost calm.

"It's her ignorance," thought Katie. "She's the ignorantest thing in town!"

Then she proceeded to put on the well-deserved screws.

"And if I go," she added, "Bessie'll go, too."

"Very well," returned Mrs. Barnes tranquilly.

Katie glared at her a moment longer; then, seeing no sign of weakening, she flung down her dishmop as an insignia of office and stalked out of the room toward the back stairs.

Mabel left by the other door and sought the living-room where Bessie was dusting.

Living-room! She looked about it with seeing

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eyes. She had not moved for the last nine months among the cultured women of the city without seeing charming homes where harmony of color and rich and effective furnishings gladdened the eye and touch. They had never roused her ambition. An anchorite's cell and sufficiently stocked bookshelves satisfied her. It was easy to take for granted that James Barnes was satisfied with things as she had found them in his home. She remembered all too vividly now his tentative suggestions in the autumn of changes for the better, but all was vague in his mind, and meeting no response he had not urged anything.

She had given luncheons to her clubwomen, but always in some hotel or a private room at Florio's. Now her sad eyes swept the unlovely room; then she spoke to the maid in even tones: "Bessie, I've just come from Katie. She is offended because I wish to order the meals and look after the details of the kitchen a little. I asked her to scrub the icebox and she's going away. She says you'll go, too."

Bessie, who had observed with surprise her mistress's appearance at this hour of the morning, listened to her in amazement and toward the end with apprehension.

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"Oh, I'd hate leaving Miss Lovett," she exclaimed.

"I'm glad of that. I don't want you to go. I shall need you to cook the dinner to-night. Perhaps you could talk with Katie. I'm very fond of studying things, Bessie, and now I want to study housekeeping. I know Katie has fallen into habits and will feel at first that I'm in the way; but perhaps she can see that I have a right to do it and that every head of a house ought to do it."

Bessie looked very sober. She was thinking hard. She believed there was no easier place in town and the wages were good. Besides, it would be like going out of the sunshine to leave Miss Lovett.

"You and Katie talk it over," went on Mrs. Barnes. "I'm going to market now," and Mabel went out to the waiting car.

"She'll get tired of it," soothed Bessie to the irate Katie a little later.

Several times that day at the office James Barnes thought again of that act of his wife in lighting the fire last night in his den.

"Poor little blunderer," he reflected. "I suppose she sat there in one of those chairs and scoured herself; but it's an acute attack. It's

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rather too bad that I started her to thinking; but I shall not worry. Habit is strong and she'll soon be herself again."

That night he came home to dinner. His wife wore a pretty gown and her hair was carefully dressed.

After the usual conventional exchange, Bessie left the room with the first course.

"I had a little encounter to-day," said Mabel, "and came off victorious."

"Of course, my dear," agreed her husband.

Every word he said hurt her, however innocently intentioned; but she went on calmly:—

"Not exactly. It was with the potentate in our kitchen, Katie. I put in my oar; asked her to scrub the ice-box and told her I could order the meals. She was furious and threatened to leave."

"Dangerous experiment," remarked James Barnes. "It's a pretty good rule in this world to let well enough alone."

Mabel's cheeks flushed; but she swallowed and controlled her voice.

"I did n't think it was well enough for me to be a stranger in my own kitchen," she answered. "I wanted to change all that."

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Her husband did not avoid her eyes, but his were coolly indifferent.

"Better not, perhaps," he replied. "You were quite right last evening in saying that I could afford the small difference it may make. Don't worry yourself. I mean it."

Bessie came in with the fish. Its blank eyes, Mabel thought, were not more expressionless than those before which hers dropped. Camilla had reminded her that she must not resent punishment.

She sent Bessie out for a forgotten sauce.

"I want to tell you," she said, with a sick sense of futility, "that Katie stayed and the ice-box was scrubbed."

"Bravo," returned James Barnes pleasantly, beginning to serve the fish. "Score one."

His wife welcomed now the presence of the waitress. Her impetuous, imperious nature was crucified in the knowledge that her husband knew that her novel action had been performed with the motive of reparation and yet that he was untouched by it. How ungenerous not to extend a word of acknowledgment; of encouragement.

Yet she knew, who better? that there was not an ungenerous fiber in the man's nature. She

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had wasted, devastated all that could respond to her. It was a relief in her despair to have him say that his plans had changed and that he was going to New York the following day.

One of the clubs to which she belonged was working ardently for suffrage. She had been listening to noble, self-abnegating speakers this afternoon and going through her own duties as secretary like an automaton.

To-morrow was free of engagements. James was going to New York. She would go out to the farm. She wished to see it before Elaine came home. Would he confide in Elaine? Would Elaine's neutrality relapse into the old contempt? The girl had not come home since last September. She had elected to spend the holidays with a schoolmate. Her father had visited her twice. The last time had been in February; but her stepmother had never seen her since that long ago September evening when the crude young girl made no attempt to conceal her scorn.

It was a very different Elaine externally who greeted her father with smiling affection in the elegantly appointed reception room of the school on a June morning.

He held her at arm's length and surveyed

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her admiringly. She had altered wonderfully for the better. The roses and soft curves of youth were hers now. She had always had a slim grace, but her crisp, spoiled-child brusqueness was replaced by a gracious repose and self-possession which spoke wonders for the ladies who had polished and softened her angles.

Mr. Barnes was presented to so many other examples of social perfection that he began to grow restive.

"Say, Elaine," he confided at last, when they had risen from a formal luncheon, "this Vere de Vere business is getting on my nerves. I'm beginning to step on my own feet and sympathize with that fellow who said he felt like an accident going somewhere to happen. If there aren't any more formalities, let's get out of here."

Elaine's little laugh was just right. It expressed leniency, affection, respectful amusement.

"We may go any time," she replied. "There are none of the ordinary closing ceremonies here."

"Ordinary! I should think not!" returned her father; "but it's all right. I've got my money's worth in these cheeks" — he pinched

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them — “and your bright eyes. Everything further is velvet.”

He found a good deal of velvet on the train going home. Elaine looked exquisite in her perfectly tailored costume, and was an epitome of girlish complaisance.

“I have n’t had time to ask for Mamabel,” she said when they were started. “She is quite well, I hope?”

“Entirely so. Busy as ever. That young stepmother of yours is the busiest woman in town.”

The least deprecating cloud shadowed Elaine’s smooth forehead.

“‘Stepmother’ is a rather unpleasant word,” she replied. “I’m so much obliged to Junior for inventing something prettier. How is the dear child?”

“He has improved as fast as you have. Camilla has done wonders for him.”

“Yes, that has really been the burden of your letters lately. I remember Miss Lovett. She used to be at Cousin Cherry’s sewing sometimes when I went there as a little girl.”

“Yes; but she was an unripe persimmon in those days. Now she’s the ripe article full of sweetness.”

Elaine nodded. “Quite wonderful that she

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dropped out of the sky like that into your office."

"Yes, the sky is the accepted dwelling for angels, I believe."

"Oh," Elaine raised her eyebrows with a little smiling protest, "don't frighten me by suggesting that I have to live up to an angel!"

"I have something worse than that to tell you, Elaine. You know how I love the old place at Brierly. Well, take a brace now, I've bought it."

Elaine leaned back in her armchair and the onlooker might have suspected some strain on her expression of charming receptivity.

"Now, don't shoot till I explain. There is n't going to be the least pressure on any one of the family to go there; but I want it to look attractive enough to catch you sometimes. I'd like Junior to have some of the experiences that I had. A child without any memories of the country is cheated of his birthright, according to my way of thinking."

"It would be good for Junior," agreed Elaine. "I've been wondering where you and Mamabel intended to go this summer."

"My dear, I can take you anywhere you

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want to go for a few weeks; or had you some plan in mind with your girl friends?"

"No, I had n't made any plans. I'm afraid, though," — Elaine gave her mischievous, but sweet and deprecating, smile, — "I'm afraid I have n't yearned for Brierly."

"Just as you say, Girlie, about that, but give Junior a good send-off. Help me put some finishing touches on the house."

"Mamabel does n't feel enthusiastic, then?"
Elaine's question was pleasantly conversational.

Her father shook his head, smiling. "She's city broke, you see. She would n't mind being forty miles from a lemon; but when it comes to exile from the libraries, it's a serious matter. She's a great student."

Under Elaine's faultless exterior her mind was busy.

Her father's telegraphic letters had told her little of the outcome of his matrimonial venture, but she was about to see with her own eyes.

"Yes," she replied. "You've held her up to me as an example in that; but," again the mischievous and sweet depreciation, "I hope she's not likely to put me through an examination."

"I'll do it instead. What do you know about wall-paper, Elaine?"

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She shrugged her shoulders. "Very little, I'm afraid. Not as much as Mamabel does, probably."

"Oh, that has n't any printing on it," he returned good-humoredly. "It is n't in her class."

The light remark was confirmation to Elaine of what she had always suspected. Bitter resentment toward her stepmother burned beneath her charming mask.

Was ever a man on earth so good, so generous as Daddy; and he had had to wait for her home-coming for assistance and sympathy.

"You might try me, anyway," she said lightly. "I have an idea that I would n't give Junior the nightmare with my selections."

Her father took out paper and pencil and they made a list of the well-remembered rooms.

"I have Lucretia Watt installed in the kitchen, and her cousin, Pete Miller, in the barn," explained Mr. Barnes, "and Victor Ford is overseeing repairs for me."

"Who?" asked Elaine, dangerously near to losing her poise.

"Victor Ford. You remember Mamabel's brother, my lawyer. It's quiet times with him just now and he is being a most efficient right hand for me in this matter. I have n't even

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bought furniture yet. Thought you might like to furnish a playhouse as well now as you did years ago."

"It sounds like a lark," returned Elaine, no hint in her expression suggesting that furnishing a house in Brierly was her idea of nothing to do. Her worldly knowledge had expanded wonderfully in the last nine months.

Mabel had sent the car to the station to meet them. Mr. Barnes did not betray his surprise at the sight of Dick, but he noted another instance of his wife's repentant thoughtfulness.

When they ascended the home steps and went into the living-room, Elaine cast a comprehensive glance around her old habitat.

"What a barracks!" was her unspoken comment.

Her stepmother emerged from the back of the room.

"If she were n't so pale, and had some expression, she'd be extremely good-looking," thought Elaine, as she presented her cheek to be kissed.

"I'm so glad you've come home," said Mabel. "I'm sure your father has missed you every day."

James Barnes kissed the speaker lightly.

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"He'd better dare not to," returned Elaine, shaking her gloved finger at him.

"How well you look!" continued Mabel, gazing at the girl wistfully.

"Oh, I'm in rude health. Where's Junior? I must see him. Come upstairs, Daddy."

They went away and Mabel lifted a vase of roses from the table and gazed at them; then she lifted them to her face where cool lips had touched.

CHAPTER XVII

MABEL SEES THE FARM

ON the day her husband went to New York Mabel Barnes wired her brother that she was coming out to the farm.

Through Pete Miller the news had spread, and a knot of persons with errands at the railroad store saw the tall, slender, dark-haired woman descend from the train and greet her brother.

Pete Miller was sitting as nonchalantly as he was able in a shiny, new five-passenger car drawn up beside the platform. Motor-cycles and runabouts there were in town; but cars of this pretension had as yet only swept through the village, shaking Brierly dust from off their tires. Jim Barnes's new automobile was the pride of the town.

"The best ain't any too good for Jim, I tell ye," remarked his proud neighbors, and such as saw his wife to-day repeated the phrase.

"Well, you have given us a surprise party," remarked Victor, as he welcomed his sister. "We are n't ready for you. What did you come for? Pete, this is Mrs. Barnes. Pete is the

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coming chauffeur of Elm Farm: the slowly-coming."

The speaker put his sister into the tonneau, then himself joined Pete, who was lounging, his hands resting carelessly on the wheel, the consciously admired and envied cynosure of gazing eyes.

"Get over here, Pete," added Victor. "I'll take her home."

"Just a minute, Mr. Ford," responded Pete with unprecedented quickness. "Just till we get out o' sight o' the store."

"All right," laughed Victor, dropping into the seat. "We're headed right and I don't believe you can smash anything till we get across the bridge."

A little later, with only the willows to witness his deposition, Pete changed places with Victor, who speeded up the village street, annihilating the space between the store and the cottage by the big rock.

"Don't you ever drive as fast as this, Pete," he said, as he slowed up preparatory to entering the avenue. Pete grinned.

Mabel exclaimed in surprise at the loveliness of the gothic arch under which they passed.

"Oh, it's a great place," remarked Victor,

Mabel sees the Farm

with the pride of proprietorship. "I've found my vocation all right, Mabel. Foreman and overseer for a landed proprietor; but why did n't you wait a couple of weeks? Did n't Barnes tell you—"

"Oh, it was a sudden fancy of mine," said Mabel. "He went to New York to get Elaine, and I thought I'd run out here and see how you were getting on. I believe I was a little homesick for you, Victor."

The young man cast a look at the speaker over his shoulder. He suddenly realized that his sister did not look quite natural.

"Seems to me you're pale," he returned. "Better cut out the midnight oil for a while and come here and study botany."

"I don't care if I never see another book," was the amazing reply. "Drive slower, please."

"Hoity-toity!" remarked Victor. "Here is a case of indigestion! Well, I'm glad you did come, Mabel. We've been wiping off the slate so far, and now it's clean and ready for a fresh start."

"We begin together, the farm and I," thought the wife.

As the slowly moving car emerged from the elm avenue, she gazed up at the house brave

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in its buff paint with white trimmings. Two men were running lawn-mowers over the grassy slopes, and Victor drove the car up to the front piazza, renewed now in every ailing bit of wood.

Leaving the car, the mistress of it all stood there, looking off in every direction and thinking of her husband's boyhood. Two hundred feet away glistened the forest-bordered pond. She could hear the merest tinkle of its waterfall, feeding the babbling brook that ran off through the meadow.

The terrace in front of the house had been made smooth; the old elm trees rising at either end were magnets for the birds. At the right of the house rose an artificial mound of earth with grassy sides, its edges planted with flowers, and from its midst rose a second smaller mound grassed all over and surmounted with a clump of cedar trees.

Every inch of these broad acres held for her husband some association to which she had repeatedly refused to be introduced.

Victor had gone with Pete to the improvised garage and she stood there looking through a mist at the rolling landscape disappearing in forest trees.

Mabel sees the Farm

"Oh, be good to me, be good to me," her heart cried out to the sun-bathed scene. "Help me!"

Victor appeared around the corner of the house and was surprised at the expression on her face. He felt a sudden dismay. "She had done it, then," just as he had expected. They had quarreled. Never mind. She was his sister. She had always been a good one; and she was unhappy.

"Hope you don't mind eating in the kitchen," he said. "If it was a little warmer, we'd come out under the trees."

Lucretia's sharp eyes had discerned the lady in the motor as it glided up to the house. "And that," she thought, with some excitement, "that's Mis' Barnes!"

Lucretia had become an object of interest in the village and many a neighbor had trudged up the elm avenue to sit and talk with her while she worked to feed the little army of workmen who were rejuvenating the house and environs.

Charity Shanklin was among these visitors. She wore an important air, as befitted a connection of a rumored millionaire, and addressed Lucretia at first as one having authority. Lucretia, however, with nine points of the law in her favor, tacitly refused to be patronized;

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so Charity found it more satisfying to descend to terms of equality and pump Lucretia as to Camilla and the Jims, Junior and Senior. She had inquired eagerly on her last visit if Mrs. Barnes had appeared, and, finding she had not, ventured to prognosticate that she never would.

"Just to think of that sly Camilla," she said, "never telling me she was going to apply for the position of that young one's nurse. Camilla's a close one. 'T was me told her little Jim did n't have an atom of care from his stepmother." And from this Miss Shanklin proceeded to a spirited description of Mabel, which received a halt when a young man in gray flannel shirt, and trousers tucked into his boots, entered the kitchen. She supposed him to be one of the workmen, and, despite his prepossessing appearance, waited impatiently for him to disappear and give her a chance to finish a sentence which was to rip the last shred of Mrs. Barnes's character as a housekeeper into ribbons, and finish her job neatly.

"I have a man out here to clean the cistern," said Victor. "It'll be one more mouth to feed, Lucretia."

"All right. Know Miss Shanklin, Mr. Ford?

Mabel sees the Farm

She's a connection o' Mr. Barnes. This is Mis' Barnes's brother, Cherry."

Lucretia had a sense of humor, and the consternation in her caller's face made her stride to the sink, and catching up a pail, begin to pump vigorously, muttering something about "makin' sure of some water."

Victor shook hands with the stranger, his sunshiny smile falling on her dismayed effort at self-possession. "Busy times," he said.

"What's he doing here?" asked Charity when he had disappeared.

"What ain't he doin'," responded Lucretia. "That young man's got faculty. I don't know but he'll get some ginger into Pete yet. He can make him hustle, anyway, and it's more'n any one else ever did; but Pete'd do anything for the sake o' drivin' that car. He's more tickled than a boy with red boots."

"Is there an automobile?" responded Charity with awe.

"Law, yes," replied Lucretia. "There's everything, or goin' to be. I never heard o' such plans."

"It's a mercy he did n't hear me," declared Miss Shanklin meditatively. "I was only goin' to say—" She paused; apparently her courage

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had been dashed. "I didn't know as Mrs. Barnes had a brother," she finished. "He's handsome. I've heard she was."

"If she's as clever as her brother, it's all anybody would ask," replied Lucretia.

Miss Shanklin rocked in silence and watched her companion set the table for dinner for the workmen. She had nothing to complain of in Lucretia; for the morning after the latter had accepted James Barnes's proposition she had gone to the parsonage and taken Miss Shanklin into a conference of ways and means. All the good pieces of furniture, the old mahogany which had been the pride of the present owner's mother, were now scattered about James Barnes's city home in unregarded shabbiness, only needing to be refinished to show their value. The Metcalfs had furnished with their own scanty belongings, and Charity had helped Lucretia to dispose of them all. A few things they had kept themselves; the rest they gave away, Lucretia perfectly willing that Cherry should help her in the rôle of Lady Bountiful.

To-day, as Mabel entered the house, she saw it empty as a cup. The workmen had gone. The stairs went up out of a small hallway. There was a front and a back parlor, and at the

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side of the latter a library. At the rear in the ell were a dining-room and kitchen. Five bedrooms and a storeroom were on the second floor, and the attic was divided into two bedrooms, the north and the south chamber, as they were called; the south one had belonged to James Barnes once, and his boyish eyes could see the stars only through the branches of the great elms. Cold sometimes — O, how cold! — in winter; hot sometimes — O, how hot! — in summer: but home; and a wonderful place from which to hear the frogs and katydids and crickets.

Mabel looked about the empty rooms now as she passed through, an alien, longing to be naturalized. Honesty compelled her to admit that a week ago she would have been sure to find an excuse which would relieve her of any part in furnishing this house. To-day she suffered cruelly because she might have no hand in it. She knew if she went to her husband and asked as a favor to join in the care of the furnishing, he would look at her with a sort of surprised tolerance, and consent. Oh, yes, he would consent. He would always show her kindness when she forced herself upon his attention. Kindness! She forced back the stinging tears.

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Patience. The change could not be wrought in a minute, and she must not cry out at the punishment.

"Some job to make this place livable, eh?" asked Victor cheerily; "but good fun, too, for any one who likes it. Barnes seems to think Elaine won't mind lending a hand."

Mabel swallowed. Even to Victor it had not occurred that she might help. She summoned her courage.

"I daresay even she is n't such a greenhorn as I am," she answered; "but there's no telling what I'm going to learn in the way of domesticity. I told you I was tired of books. I'm beginning to study housekeeping now."

Her brother gave her a quick glance. He could have sworn that her lip quivered before she caught it under her teeth.

"Well, you're coming to close quarters with the kitchen works to-day," he said, leading the way through the bare dining-room with its windows looking down toward the avenue of elms.

Lucretia met them at the kitchen door, and Mabel saw that she was wiping her hand on her apron preparatory to greeting, so she gave the hard hand a hearty grip, humbly eager to impress its owner favorably.

Mabel sees the Farm

Lucretia examined the young wife with critical curiosity, and all the damning things she had heard about her went trooping through her head; but Mabel's brother had won Lucretia's heart by what she termed his horse-sense, and she held her own estimate of the new mistress of the house in abeyance.

"I can't see as she's anyway stuck up," she thought, as Mabel pulled off her gloves and sat down to the kitchen table to be helped to pork and beans.

"We'd have had a steak if we'd known you were coming," said Victor; "would n't we, Lucretia?"

"Just as lieves to as not," agreed Lucretia, setting a dish of mealy potatoes on the table and eying Mabel's gray tailored suit approvingly.

"Real plain good dress, I call it," she thought.

"I'm glad you did n't. I'm glad to be reminded of pork and beans. We have n't had them for a long time. I had done a great deal of housework when I was married, Lucretia, and for a long time I just wanted to rest from it; but now I'm taking it up again and I'm so glad to get ideas."

"There!" thought Lucretia triumphantly; "does that sound stuck up and heartless? Give

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a dog a bad name and hang him. I wish Cherry Shanklin was here this minute. Married to a millionaire and glad to eat pork and beans. Pretty as a picture she'd be if she was n't so awful pale."

Her pallor impressed her brother, too. All the familiar self-confidence of the flattered club-woman was gone from his sister's manner. Every word she spoke but verified his suspicion that some shock had taken place in her life.

"The worm will turn," he reflected, as he scattered pepper on his potato, "and it looks as if this time the worm had administered a pretty stiff dose of medicine and she had taken it. Poor girl."

"One of your new connections was here yesterday, Mabel," he remarked,—"sister of the minister, Lucretia says. Every time I passed the door I heard her dressing down somebody. I thought I caught Elaine's name once. I warn you to walk Spanish when you meet that lady."

Lucretia felt her cheeks grow warm as she moved from stove to table. "Will you have a cup o' coffee, Mis' Barnes? Yes, Cherry is kind o' talkative."

"H'm," grunted Victor. "She sounded to me

Mabel sees the Farm

as though she needed to go to the hospital and have her gossip taken out."

This amused Lucretia to the extent of a laugh. "You see it's a small town," she remarked apologetically.

"And after all," said Mabel, "I suppose each of us needs to have something taken out."

"Now, ain't she sweet-spoken?" thought Lucretia; "and those eyes ain't the eyes of any hypocrite."

"I guess we could make you some rosier if you'd stay out to Brierly awhile, Mis' Barnes," she said.

"I intend to," returned Mabel. "I'm very eager to come."

Victor choked on a swallow of coffee. They were using kitchen dishes, heavy crockery and steel knives and forks.

"Your little boy, too. I believe he'll pick right up here."

"I'm sure of it," replied Mabel. "With Camilla to take care of him and this sweet air to breathe, he'll be a happy child this summer."

"Wish I thought she'd be a happy woman," muttered Lucretia, when dinner was over and

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she saw the guest strolling across the grass toward the mound with her brother. "Wonder what she looks like when she smiles. If she ever had any spring she ain't got it now, and she's about as pleasant-spoken as any one I ever saw. Wonder why Hetty Landor wanted to stuff Cherry with all that truck, and Cherry swallowed it whole. 'Have her gossip cut out.'" Lucretia rested her hand on her hip and laughed silently. "Say, there's lots o' folks needs that operation."

Her watching eyes saw, from the window over the sink, Victor taking his sister's arm and helping her up the flight of wooden steps that led to the walk on the edge of the grassy mound.

"It's a wonder some girl has n't caught him before this," she thought admiringly. "'F I was to write a ro-mance I'd make him the hero and have princesses fightin' for him." From this fancy she descended to earth at the sight of Pete cautiously reconnoitering at the kitchen door. "Yes, come along in," she said, beginning to clatter with pots and pans. "Eat your dinner and get through with it. Mis' Barnes is goin' back at three o'clock."

"Ain't she sweet, though," said Pete devoutly,

Mabel sees the Farm

sitting down at the table and beginning an eager attack.

"Forgot to taste of her," retorted Lucretia, making a mighty racket with the crockery.

Victor pointed out to his sister the border of verbenas and pansies growing at the side of the path they were treading, while on the other hand rose the secondary mound of grass from which grew the clump of cedars.

"Of course, you see, Victor," said Mabel suddenly, "that something has happened to me."

"And, of course, you know," he returned quickly, "that if there's anything I can do for you, I want to do it."

"You tried to save me," she said, "and I would n't be warned. Now I have to work out my own salvation. No one can help me."

"And, of course, you can do it," returned Victor stoutly, his earnestness a protest against the hopelessness of her passive look.

"I should have been very courageous once," replied Mabel. "Now I know I have nobody but you, Victor."

"What do you mean by that? Has Barnes—"

She smiled up at her brother's reddening, apprehensive face.

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“You know James,” she said. “You know he does n’t know how to be anything but kind to any one weaker than himself. I’m only reaping what I’ve sown; but,” she reiterated it, “you are all I have in the world, Victor.”

CHAPTER XVIII

FURNISHING THE FARMHOUSE

ON the morning after Elaine's arrival, the family gathered at the breakfast table for the first time since she had left; but she had no idea that this was so.

She knew Junior was enjoying a novel privilege, or rather trying to enjoy it, for Camilla had declined to come downstairs and his heart was painfully divided.

Mamabel had treated him very differently ever since the night he told her about the angel, and he was convinced that his missionary work had availed. Sister was wonderfully agreeable, but he did n't care for her butterfly kisses and patronizing caresses.

Her talk of New York absorbed the attention at the breakfast table, and Junior, in spite of his gala attire in place of the dressing-gown, and the grown-up air of the meal, felt that 'mid pleasures and palaces tho' he might roam, there was no place like the little room upstairs where he and Camilla ate eggs tête-à-tête,

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Later in the morning Mabel saw the motor come and bear Elaine away. The girl was to meet her father by appointment and give the day to choosing furnishings for the farm. Mabel had thrown out a hint or two to Elaine that she would be glad to help; but they had been ignored very sweetly. Elaine's manners were a marvel to one who had seen the unpromising chrysalis.

The dignified demeanor of her stepmother won the girl's approval, and she realized how much more trying their life might be if Mabel's manners conformed to the crudeness of the home which had satisfied her. No such taste as that evinced here must be permitted to clash with the sophistication Elaine had gained.

Mabel had recounted at the breakfast table, thinking the confession more easily made in public, that she had visited the farm and had eaten dinner in the kitchen.

"It's a lovely old place. I was sorry I had n't seen it sooner," she said.

"Do you mean you never had seen it!" exclaimed Elaine in well-bred surprise.

"I never had," admitted Mabel, coloring to the back of her pretty neck.

So she was left at home this morning to the

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study of her now obnoxious calendar and the fulfilling of her engagements.

Her husband had turned as he was going out.

"If Elaine meets me at eleven and sends back the car for you, will that be in time?" he asked.

"Plenty of time," she returned, controlling her desire to cry out that she did n't want the car; that she should never want it again!

The way her husband had taken the news that she had visited the farm was just as he acknowledged each one of her efforts; with kindly understanding, but the sincere wish that she would not trouble herself.

"It will kill me!" she exclaimed to Camilla.

"No, indeed," returned the latter. "You are going to learn true happiness. No human being can give it to you. If your husband took you in his arms now and covered you with love and praise —"

"Oh, I should die of happiness!"

"No, that would n't be harmony yet; not without the foundation, the knowledge of the basic truth of being on which we build safely. You'd be happy for a while and your hurts soothed until something else came up to jar you apart. You must have something to build on. You must know that you and your husband

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have each your place in the Divine Mind and that you cannot hurt each other; know that unselfishness, the Golden Rule, is the law of life. As we were saying, it comes as a new language to most of us and we have to bring patience and humility to the study of it."

"I must begin," said Mabel. "I must study."

And study she did, as never before in her brain-worshiping life. She procured a Bible and the commentary upon it which Camilla used; and for a long time to come, her other books would grow dusty. Every mountain of her ambition had been laid low and in her new humility she found her valley of decision.

Elaine admitted to herself that her stepmother was entirely different from what she had expected. Mabel did not seem especially happy, but at least no one could accuse her of aggressiveness in any form. She was a bit haughty, perhaps, in a quiet, self-contained way, and not at all demonstrative; but on the whole, Elaine, glass of fashion and mold of form,—good form,—considered that it was no wonder her father had been attracted. The only blot to her on her stepmother's 'scutcheon was that she had not helped Daddy out in his pet plans regarding the farm. Now that she had come, her

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stepmother seemed to wish to have a hand in the matter.

Nothing seems precious, thought sophisticated Elaine, until some one else has possession of it. No; Mamabel must be punished for her opposition to anything that was dear to Daddy's heart. Moreover, she, a mature person, had lived in this old house nearly a year and made no effort to redeem its forlorn living-room. How could she be trusted with furnishings!

So Elaine went firmly forth to the fine shop devoted to house decoration, where in the wallpaper department her father had promised to meet her.

Meanwhile James Barnes in his office was being confronted with an unexpected business complication which necessitated his presence at an important conference in another office. All other considerations were swallowed up in the imperative need for action; but as he looked at his watch the memory of Elaine and their plans swept over him. At the same moment Victor Ford walked into his office.

"My dear boy," said the grain dealer, speaking hurriedly, "my lucky star never did me a better turn! Elaine's waiting for me at Flanders's to select paper and furniture and all the

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rest of it. Here are the data," seizing a bunch of papers from a desk drawer, "the measurements and everything. Take them over to her, will you, and help her select? I can't possibly go, a business call, and I want to get her while she's in the mood. See you to-night if not before. I have n't a minute now." And, seizing his hat, James Barnes hurried out of the office, leaving his brother-in-law standing with his mouth open, staring dazed at the bundle of papers in his hands.

"Well, I'll be—" he began. He had intended to make a report, saying that everything was ready for just this operation, and then try to see his sister, whose face had haunted him since he saw her last.

In his extreme reluctance to share this errand with the most rude and disagreeable girl he had ever met, he had to remind himself that, whatever her faults, she had played no part in Mabel's present unhappiness. He could hardly doubt, however, that she would add to it.

But there she was at Flanders's, waiting, and in his rôle as farm factotum he could not fail to carry the papers to her and give her her father's message.

"Wall-paper department," Mr. Barnes had

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shouted over his shoulder as he disappeared. Accordingly to the wall-paper department at Flanders's Victor hied himself, bristling with antagonism.

As he left the elevator at the right floor he saw a graceful, girlish figure, perfectly dressed in the height of fashion, with none of its eccentricities. As she turned her face so he could see it, his mental comment was that she had on the most *chic* and becoming hat he ever saw on a golden head. She was smiling as he perceived her and speaking in a low voice to the clerk who was unrolling paper over the rack for its exhibition.

Her soft curves and healthful coloring, her gracious smile, her street costume with the perfect hat, combined to make her for the moment unrecognizable as the anæmic heroine of the most trying evening of Victor's life; but as her eyes turned toward the clicking door of the elevator, hoping to see her father's figure, she perceived a young man, remarkably good-looking, whom she felt she had met somewhere. She could not place him at once, but had a vague consciousness of a disagreeable association with him. Not sure but that it was some one to whom she ought to bow, she redoubled her attention to

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the wall-papers, and Victor strolled over to a counter laden with samples of chintz, while he awaited the arrival of a white-paper face out of which would look eyes like blue marbles.

Elaine's thoughts were not now on the papers. It would be a poor beginning to her new life at home, to cut so attractive and prosperous-looking a man as this vaguely familiar person. She cudgeled her brains and made occasion to turn carelessly in a manner to catch a helpful, though fleeting, glance. The stranger's unrecognizing eyes were looking straight toward her.

It was enough. She knew that Victor Ford was at Brierly. Her father had spoken of him this morning. However, here he was, without a doubt, wearing that same unsmiling, speculative look which she had resented. In her new code, the mere fact that you hated a man was no excuse for failing to greet him if he happened to be your father's brother-in-law. She believed him waiting for her recognition.

"Oh, how do you do, Mr. Ford," she said, with a gracious movement forward, as she extended her hand. "Pardon me for not recognizing you at once. The light —" If it was any gratification to her to see a man "struck all of a heap," as Victor afterward expressed it, she

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had it now as the young man whisked off his hat and shook hands with her. He colored to his temples. This exquisite creature, this — Elaine!

"I'm afraid I don't bring my welcome with me, Miss Barnes," he said. "Your father was called to some business meeting and could n't come and he has made me his deputy. Here are the papers with the measurements."

He conquered his embarrassment as he searched in an inner pocket for the papers. Elaine's smile vanished.

"You men!" she said; but her voice continued smooth. "There is no dependence to be placed on you! I believe I will wait till another day."

"That is for you to decide. Your father is very eager, however, to get Junior into the country, and I came in this morning to tell him that the well and cistern have been cleaned out and that everything is ready for occupation except a few trifles like beds and chairs."

Elaine listened composedly, but she heard scarcely half of what Victor said. She was thinking of that unspeakable evening when she had insulted his sister, and his eyes had revealed his contempt for her. What a grotesque idea that they should furnish the farm together! and if

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his sister had shown a proper spirit, it would not be necessary.

'She would remind him that, rude child as she had been a year ago, she had nevertheless been entirely correct in her estimate.

"I believe these selections might have been made some time since," she said sweetly, "but there seemed no one to do it. Daddy has been waiting for me; so I suppose he would rather I did not postpone it."

The shot hit the mark. Victor bit his lip. There was nothing to say. No one knew better than he that she was right. He believed that a little rip in this silky manner would be sufficient to reveal underneath the ruthless girl he remembered.

"I suppose you don't need me any more, then?" he returned briefly.

Elaine was content with her triumph, for his face was transparent.

"Why, I think you could help, for the place is fresh in your mind. Of course, if you have some other engagement —"

Victor shook his head. "My time belongs to your father at present," he returned shortly.

"Then let's get right to work," she said. "You keep the papers," she handed them back to him,

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and the attentive clerk placed two chairs for what he considered the most charming couple he had seen in many a moon. The young man was a bit grumpy, and before the selections were completed, the salesman had dropped his theory of lovers, and decided that they were brother and sister.

From the wall-papers they went to the rugs, and throughout the experience Victor reluctantly acknowledged the assurance with which his companion sought and found the appropriate articles. She made many deferential appeals to his judgment, to all of which he made the briefest possible response, always agreeing with her opinions. Mabel was unhappy enough, and Elaine had not scrupled to accent her sins of omission to himself. The girl was freshly arrived and perhaps had no suspicion of her stepmother's troubled heart. He knew his sister well enough to be certain she had not worn it on her sleeve; but Mabel's voice rang in his ears:—

“I have no one but you in the whole world, Victor.”

He knew that James Barnes had not fallen to earth from the heights of his infatuation without plenty of bruises; but his sympathy with the father need not extend to this cocksure

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young woman. She should understand from the start that he was first, last, and all the time, Mabel's brother.

Elaine's unruffled, charming manner gave no evidence that she knew that she had wounded him, and that he was unforgiving. She persisted in asking his advice and forcing him to consult their list, all the time increasingly determined to subjugate him.

"Seeing that Junior is the central figure in all this, I think the southeast room should be the nursery, don't you?" she asked.

"It would be very good," returned Victor, "except that it has no chimney. The room behind it facing east has had an air-tight stove in it."

Elaine nodded. "I'm so glad you thought of that, for it's very important, especially if Camilla should want to stay on with him into the autumn for any reason. I suppose in the end Daddy will rout out the furnace and have some modern heating apparatus put in; but it's all such an experiment, I hope he'll wait till another year."

They were looking at Delft blue and white rugs for the nursery, and now Elaine consulted the east-room measurements.

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The interested salesman addressed Victor: "I think your wife will be much pleased with this reversible article," he said.

Victor gave him a stony gaze. "We're not married," he replied distinctly; and Elaine, very much engrossed in the list, grew somewhat pinker at the dryness of Victor's denial.

"Pardon me," returned the salesman. "I heard you say nurs — pardon me."

He saw no reason why this young man's glare should seem to expect him to trail in the dust. Surely the fellow should be flattered.

In each department they visited, the clerk was sure to make some reference to their supposed relationship, and it amazed Victor that Elaine never seemed to resent it. When it came to a point of too acute embarrassment for himself, he was obliged to set the salesman right and he always did it with such curt frankness as to give his fair companion a little sting. She was becoming much more interested in him than in her errands.

She turned to him at last with a little air of appeal.

"Do give me something to eat," she said. "I'm so tired."

"Oh, oh, certainly," returned Victor, stuffing

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the lists into his pocket. "Where shall we go?"

Elaine named a place and Victor demurred.

"I'm afraid I don't look the part. I'm more fit for a lunch-counter to-day. The honest workingman did n't come in town last evening with the idea of taking a fashionable young woman out to lunch."

"You'll do quite well," returned Elaine, smiling at him.

He preferred that she should not smile at him. She looked too pretty.

When finally they were at the table she sighed with relief and took off her gloves.

"Your hands make me wish I could eat with mine in my pockets," he remarked, spreading out his strong fingers which had been hammered and cut variously in his unaccustomed duties.

"Do you like it out there?" asked Elaine wearily.

"Yes, very much. What will you have to eat?"

"The idea of asking me!" ejaculated Elaine faintly. "As if you could n't see that I'm beyond telling."

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She knew instinctively that it expands the heart of one human being to feed another.

"Well, let me see." Victor picked up the card he had pushed toward her. It was a busy hour and no waiter came to them at once. "I have just a dollar and ninety cents in my pocket. If you had come to my lunch-counter, you could have had quite a lot to eat; as it is, I think a sandwich and a cup of tea for you and a fee to the waiter will about clean me out. I'll try not to watch you hungrily."

"Oh, how ravenous you make me!" exclaimed Elaine, coming to life charmingly. She held up a silver vanity case. "If I had a purse with me instead of this, we could pool our resources; as it is, give me that card at once, and I'll show you what a good housekeeper I am!"

Were those the blue marbles, those bright, mischievous eyes? How dared she laugh into his, and make such a reference after the number of times she had been pressed upon him in the last two hours?

"We'd better put on a placard before we go out again," he returned, "to make it clear that you're not a housekeeper yet."

"How cross it made you, did n't it?" she re-

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marked artlessly, while she scanned the menu. "My! Such a confirmed bachelor tone as you used to deny the allegation and despise the allegator!"

"Well," returned Victor, somewhat confused, and unable to conceal it from her, even under a dogged tone, "I did n't think it was very pleasant for you."

"I did n't mind. What difference did it make? And the next time you refuse me, please do so in a more complimentary tone."

The roguish glance she sent him required a smile from the recipient. He forgot Mabel for the moment and gave it. Then he remembered and reassumed an impassive demeanor.

"Now, let me see," she continued, satisfied for the moment with the involuntary flattery of his look. Victor, from the moment she discovered him this morning, had been elevated to the rôle of one of her coming court of suitors. "We can have seventy cents' worth apiece," she went on. "What will you have to drink?"

"Milk," was the unexpected response.

She laughed across at him merrily. "I'm surprised you have the habit," she returned. "I thought farmers always sent all the milk

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away. Are you sure you would n't rather have molasses and water?"

"No, that's what they use in the haying season, is n't it?" he answered. "Give me time."

Before that luncheon was ordered and eaten, Elaine had accomplished much toward breaking in her novice. Spasmodically he seemed to recall something and retire to a grave distance and the girl knew that it was Mabel's memory which had intruded between them.

She liked Victor better and better as the day went on, and none the less for his sensitiveness to attack upon his sister. Elaine had set the seal of approval on her stepmother, taking her altogether, and during the latter half of the day Victor took an active part in assisting her in her errands, thereby making up for his sister's failure.

Elaine wished not only to reward him, but also to gain more of his approval for herself; so when the last errand for the present had been finished, she invited him to go home with her to dinner.

"Is the car coming for you?" he asked.

"No, Mamabel and I are dividing it to-day," she returned sweetly. "Of course, in the fall

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one of us will have an electric; but for the present we'll arrange together."

Victor, listening gravely, nodded; then he escorted the girl home to eat the dinner his sister had ordered.

CHAPTER XIX

A CRUSADER

At the dinner table Elaine made good stories of some incidents of the day, although she omitted the matrimonial suppositions of the salesmen.

Mabel fought with a jealousy which she felt to be shameful as she saw the brightness and interest in her husband's face while he listened to the girl's gay chatter, and she tried to be glad that Elaine amused Victor also, and that an atmosphere of good feeling reigned in the somber, lonely old dining-room. It occurred to her that to win Elaine would be perhaps to find an avenue back to her husband's heart.

The following morning, after her father had gone to business, Elaine sat down at the piano and began to play. Mabel, who had been prompt at breakfast, seated herself to listen.

"Oh, horrible!" exclaimed the girl after striking a few chords. She rose from the piano. "I must send for the tuner," she added.

"That was very careless of me," declared Mabel. "The piano has scarcely been opened

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since you left. It's a wonder I did n't think of it, for I have never forgotten your delightful playing."

"Oh, indeed?" returned Elaine. "I'm glad you liked it."

"Have you continued to study?" asked Mabel. "I hope so."

"Yes, I have," replied the girl, rearranging some roses which had come to her last night from Ben Walmsley. It was the first time she and her stepmother had ever been alone together.

"There can be such a thing as too much study, I have found since I saw you last, Elaine. I have made that mistake."

The girl cast a glance at the speaker where she sat near by in a new, pretty négligée gown; but Elaine kept silence. Bitterness of soul was bad for the complexion, and to express it was *bourgeois* in the extreme. She therefore let her silence speak. Victor's sister should have nothing worse than that to tell him. Possibly experience had not taught the girl that silence is the most crushing of replies. Mabel colored. She wondered how much James Barnes had told his daughter. If Elaine knew the truth, knew that her stepmother was no more than a

A Crusader

foreign body in the family circle, she had behaved very well.

"I have only lately come to a realizing sense of this," went on Mabel. "You can see that by the looks of this room and the house in general."

Elaine flashed her another quick glance, this time of surprise at her frankness.

"It does look rather like bachelors' hall, does n't it?" she returned.

"Yes, I'm going to do it over," said Mabel; "but I thought we were likely to be away so much for the next three months that it was scarcely worth while as yet."

"Have you studied that sort of thing?" asked Elaine.

Mabel thought a note of superiority was trying to break through the veneer of courtesy.

"I have had many opportunities to observe this winter," she returned quietly, "and you have, too. You will help me."

"Yes. I was expecting to do the house over myself."

Mabel could hear the repressed belligerence.

"You are doing the farmhouse," she suggested pleasantly.

"Which you should have done, I imagine,"

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returned the girl in as nearly the tone of a retort as can be permitted to a "mold of form."

"I lost that opportunity," said Mabel quietly. "I hope you will not object to my putting on some finishing touches."

"Of what sort? We want it very simple."

"Just some books and pictures that I think would be good in the nursery. I believe Junior is to be the central figure at the farm, although we don't tell him so."

"It's time he was the central figure somewhere, is n't it?" returned Elaine, patting the roses as she delivered the scratch.

The dark eyes in the armchair met the half-insolent, half-uneasy glance.

"Yes, I need to be forgiven for a good many things," answered Mabel slowly.

Even Elaine saw at last that her stepmother was unhappy. The girl felt still greater surprise, and stood for a moment irresolute.

Whatever Mamabel was getting in the way of retribution she richly deserved for having dared to marry Daddy; but there was the family harmony to be considered, and one must always remember the vulgarity of friction. Moreover, if she were not friendly with his sister, it would prejudice Victor Ford against her.

A Crusader

She had left school with the intention of marrying soon for the very reason that she had a stepmother; and while Victor Ford was no *parti*, he was worthy to be included in the court from which she was going to select.

James Barnes for the next few days had no further desire to dine at his club. He had a family. A bright young creature chatted through the meal hour. A happy little son came in to sit beside him at dessert.

The young woman at the head of his table made great effort to behave as if content, and join when she could in the conversation; but the situation did not grow easier for Mabel in those first few days after Elaine's home-coming. She seemed always discovering something further that she had missed — had thrown away. Her husband was so happy in his children. She saw the contrast now to those dinner hours of the winter, when they had both been growing more and more *distract*.

One evening Victor Ford came in to dinner and announced that the papering was done at the farm, and that Lucretia was wandering from room to room in speechless admiration.

"All ready for your carload of furniture, Miss Elaine," he finished.

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"You'll be out there to receive it, won't you?" asked her father, turning to her.

Elaine gave Victor her most mirthful, mischievous, provocative glance.

"Is Lucretia a perfectly good chaperon?" she asked demurely; "or do you think, after all we've been through, that we don't need any?"

"Let me go with you, Elaine," said Mabel quickly.

"Don't think of it, my dear," put in her husband. "You'd have to break a lot of engagements. Do you think I want Mrs. Walmsley *et al.* swooping revengefully down on me?"

"Those meetings are suspended until October," returned Mabel quietly, "and I have given in my resignation as secretary."

"It won't be necessary for you to go," said James Barnes, "for I'll let Camilla take Junior right out there; as well now as any time, and she'll be a lot of help to you, Elaine. Junior has been straining at the leash for the last week."

Victor looked questioningly at his sister.

"I think Mabel has caught the infection," he remarked. "I think she would like a finger in the pie."

There was a scarcely noticeable silence, which Mabel broke.

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"I'm having a little finger in it," she said, the color flowing up into her pale cheeks, the only sign of her emotion. "I have been buying some books for the nursery with the Rackham and Dulac illustrations."

"Rack 'em! I don't like the sound of that very well," remarked James Barnes whimsically. "Reminds me somehow of Mam'selle."

"You 'll like the looks of it, though," returned Mabel quietly. "Then I have some Maxfield Parrish pictures."

Elaine regarded her with some approval. She did, then, know some good things.

"Come out to Brierly and put them in yourself, why don't you?" returned Victor.

"Oh, I know that too many cooks spoil the broth," rejoined Mabel. "I'll go when James invites me."

"Invites you, my dear?" returned her husband. "Is n't the half of my kingdom yours to go and come in as you please?" His pleasant manner was the same as of old.

Victor, watching and listening, knew by his sister's face that it was an empty shell.

"Besides," said Mabel, "I am going to have such a big pie of my own here in the fall. I'm going to make this house charming."

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"I can't wait till the fall," declared Elaine decidedly. "It must be ready by autumn. Besides," she went on, "why need we stay in this old house, Daddy? Why not take one of the stunning new apartments?"

James Barnes lifted his eyebrows.

"I'm a passenger," he answered. "Fix it up with Mamabel."

"I should prefer to stay here," said Mabel. Elaine regarded her in surprise.

"Then it is because you don't know how charming the apartments are."

"I should n't care how charming they are. I want to stay here another year."

Her husband looked at her in an uncomprehending way, evidently surprised by her decisive tone.

"Just the very year that it makes a difference to me," exclaimed Elaine, her color deepening.

"Mamabel is the court of last appeal," said James Barnes, returning to his dinner.

"Then I should at least have the say as to how the house shall be done over," protested Elaine. "It makes much more difference to me with the entertaining I shall have to do than it does to Mamabel."

"But this is my house, Elaine," declared

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Mabel with a calm dignity which made her husband again look up at her. "You will have yours some day, and it will be done to suit you."

"Oh, very well!" returned Elaine with an excited shrug. This decision in one ordinarily so passive was most unexpected. Glancing up, she found Victor looking at her gravely and with an expression which dreaded her response. "Very well," she repeated, "perhaps Daddy will have something to say about that."

"There's only one thing to say, Elaine," replied her father pleasantly. "While Mabel likes to stay in this house, it is her undoubted right to have it as she chooses."

His wife grew so deadly pale that Victor started to push his chair back from the table, but a beseeching glance from his sister's dark eyes restrained him.

She wiped her trembling lips with her napkin, and her brother admired intensely the manner in which she summoned her self-control.

"I promise you, Elaine," she said, "that in whatever sort of function you choose to be presented socially to your own and your father's friends, you shall have nothing to complain of."

"Thank you; there is always Florio's,"

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retorted Elaine quickly; and a moment afterward, catching Victor Ford's eyes, she wished she could recall the words.

Left alone with her brother later in the evening, Mabel flung her arms around his neck and he held her in a close embrace.

"You see," she said in a stifled tone, "he thinks we shall part; but we shall not part. I love him. I can't believe it's all dead. I'm clearing away the ashes. Every day I'm clearing them away. He can't believe in me, but there must be a little spark left. Words are cheap, and they could never convince him; but actions may fan that spark. I'm not allowing myself to believe anything else. I'm working and praying. Every day I'm working and praying!"

"Dear little sister!" responded Victor, amazed and touched.

"And don't be angry with Elaine."

"I am. She is n't worthy to be Barnes's daughter. She, with her all-conquering manner and her egotism!"

"Wasn't I just as hard, just as selfish?" exclaimed Mabel. "Poor Elaine! She has n't had her blows yet, but they'll come, they'll come."

A Crusader

"She needs them badly. I'm glad the veneer cracked enough for me to get an inside view. I never saw a girl who attracted me so much as she does; and she tries to attract me. She wants me at her chariot wheels, obscure as I am; then in the fullness of time she'd cut the chain and throw me aside."

"She is a really fascinating girl," returned Mabel. "I'm glad your eyes are open, but don't feel resentful toward her. We can't afford that boomerang. You've read that book, have n't you — 'The Greatest Thing in the World'? It's true, true from cover to cover. Love is stronger than dynamite, — that love with the large 'L' that we must learn to feel for everybody —"

"Why, Mabel, what's come over you?" exclaimed her brother, still holding her close as she clung to him.

"Camilla has taught me so many things."

"Camilla!" Victor's tone expressed the acme of surprise.

"Yes; she knows the truest philosophy I ever listened to. The waters would close over my head if it were not for Camilla. I've entered on a crusade, Victor. Sometime I'll tell you what my armor is; but now we must go down-

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stairs; we must n't let James and Elaine think we are offended."

"Barnes stood by you all right," said Victor.

Mabel drew back and looked for an instant into his eyes to see if really he had been satisfied.

"James is a truly fine gentleman," she answered. "Remember, no hint of offense in your manner to Elaine."

"By Jove, you stood pat. You're a crusader all right. I should think, though, you'd welcome the change to an apartment from this back number of a house."

"I can't explain, Victor; but it's just because it is a back number. When all the back numbers have been opened and read and we know the story ends right, then I'm willing to move."

Victor looked down with affectionate non-comprehension into the dark eyes appealing to his.

"Is there any key to a woman, I wonder?" he said.

"Yes, here," she answered, and touched her heart.

CHAPTER XX

THE HOUSE-WARMING

A WEEK later the old farmhouse was furnished and finished, and Elaine and Victor wandered through it well satisfied, considering it the work of their hands. Through all the moving and settling Victor had maintained an impersonal manner toward his charming assistant, and Elaine knew that at that unfortunate dinner she had slipped back and down in his estimation. She liked him for his loyalty to his sister and she felt a reluctant respect and admiration for the manner with which her stepmother had defended her rights.

With the passing of the days the girl came to see that her father was no longer his wife's lover; and sometimes she felt even a sort of compassion for the dignified, quiet young woman who attended to her duties so efficiently. James Barnes, too, felt compassion for her. All the satisfaction with herself and the world that had marked Mabel's manner through the winter had gone, and her husband reproached himself for having deprived her of the zest of life.

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"First I married the poor child," he thought, "although she warned me; then when her life was full and happy, I broke up her paradise. If I had dreamed she was possessed of such a latent conscience, I should have held my tongue."

When all was ready at the farm they had a dinner in celebration. Bessie was delighted to go to the country, so she was there to serve, and in acknowledgment of Elaine's labors, Mabel insisted that she sit at the head of the table. Camilla and Junior had been at home at the farm for a week. The child was radiantly happy in the possession of a pony and a collie dog; and at his first visit to his charming nursery, what was his delight to find the fairy Popinjay already installed!

He neglected her shamefully, however, after a short morning visit, on all the days when she did n't have to stay in the sun and keep dry; for Pete was teaching him to ride the pony, and Angus, the collie, was always eager for a scamper with him.

"I hope Popinjay won't get so lonely that she'll go back to the city," he said seriously to Camilla.

"Oh, I think that will be all right," answered

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Camilla. "She's a contented little thing. You know she has such a sunshiny nature!"

Camilla pointed her humor by one of the significant, smiling glances that the little boy liked, and he laughed and thought it a very good joke, indeed.

"I'll tell you what would be nice, though," said Camilla, "and that is to name your pony for her. How would that do? I think she'd be pleased. Pony Popinjay!"

"Yes, yes, yes," cried Junior, hopping up and down. "Popinjay!"

"And when you're in a hurry, you can just say 'Pop,'" added Camilla.

This delightful plan Junior laid before his father and Mamabel in the automobile coming up from the station to the house-warming dinner, and as James Barnes gazed at the earnest little face with the sparkling eyes and gleeful smile his heart warmed to Camilla.

Mabel felt instinctively what was passing in his mind.

"How much we owe to Camilla," she said.

Barnes turned to her sedate face. "You realize that, too," he returned; and his wife's heart gave a little leap at his kindly tone. He seemed really to see her.

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"The child is transformed," she said quietly. "I was thinking that at the farm we should persuade Camilla to take her meals with the family."

"Good idea," returned James Barnes, nodding. "You fix it up, Mabel. Of course she should be with us at this first dinner-party. I've invited the Shanklins."

Charity Shanklin had had plenty of exercise the past week, for the wonders being worked at Elm Farm drew her irresistibly. She found it impossible to keep away; and on the preceding day Lucretia, whose excitement on her own account had been almost prostrating, had convoyed her through the completed rooms, both of them in a state bordering on hysteria.

"I never did," Charity kept saying; "no, I never did. If only poor Lucy was here to enjoy this." She took her handkerchief out of her reticule and pressed her eyes. "It's always the second wife, ain't it!"

"Well, she ain't a bit set up by it. You'll see to-morrow night. You're goin' to be awful surprised in Mis' Barnes, Cherry."

"Well, I hope so," returned Charity as one without hope.

"I s'pose you would n't look out there," re-

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marked Lucretia with a sort of desperate admiration, pausing by a window and pointing to the gleam of a new wooden roof among the trees bordering the pond. "The new boat came yesterday. Just as clever as the automobile. Scuds around the water without an oar or a sail or a thing to make it go. Mr. Ford says Mr. Barnes won't have a rowboat till Junior's older, for fear he'll drown himself. He don't care a thing about that boy — oh, no!"

"I saw little Jim on the pony with Pete as I came along," returned Charity, still inclined to be lachrymose, "and Camilla settin' under a tree with a book. Says I, 'Get up, Camilla; you'll catch your death.' Says she, 'Come and catch it with me, it's lots o' fun'; but I would n't stop. 'T ain't only that even in June the ground's damp under those spreadin' trees, but I met Ellen and Mr. Ford out the end of the avenue, so I knew there'd be nobody here and a good chance to see all the rooms. I must say Ellen looked awful pretty. She's got some heft to her the last year, and she was as sweet as a basket o' chips to me. I s'pose the next thing she'll be marryin' that young Ford."

"Well," returned Lucretia, as one who has mental reservations, "if he marries her, she will."

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"Don't he like her?" asked Charity, her little eyes twinkling hungrily.

"I can't quite make out," returned Lucretia. "They were out on the pond last night in that scuddin' boat; and there was a pretty good moon, everything looked real sightly, and I thought mebbe they'd — well, you know it did seem natural. She was bareheaded and dressed in white, real pretty."

"Gracious! In the dew!" exclaimed Charity. "She had a good, wide hat on with a pink rose to-day."

"Oh, yes, indeed," replied Lucretia; "and she gives him looks under that brim — don't you forget it. I've seen her; but he keeps on as steady as a church." The speaker paused and sniffed. "I s'pose she'll get him some day; but she did n't last night. I could tell that at breakfast. Now come and see Junior's room and see if I have n't saved the best till the last."

Lucretia led the way to the charming nursery with windows toward the rising sun. Every article in it had been selected for the child's comfort and happiness. The books and pictures of Mabel's choosing were in their places, and Lucretia walked across the room and laid

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her hand on a shining cabinet. "There's a whole band in here," she said impressively.

"Yesterday was rainy in the morning and I heard a band playin'. I tipped over a pan o' milk hurryin' to the back step to see what on earth a band was goin' up the street for before the Fourth o' July. It turned out that Junior's ma had sent him one o' these music-playin' machines. You can't think of a thing that child has n't got. If Mr. and Mrs. Metcalf could walk into this house, they'd think they was dreamin'."

"They'd think that before they got in. It's just like a picture outdoors," rejoined Charity. "I'm glad my brother'll be here to-morrow night to see it."

"It'll bring money into the church, too," said Lucretia, hushing her voice and nodding knowingly. "It's goin' to make things easier for Mr. Shanklin. You see if it don't. Mr. Barnes has got a money fountain somewhere, I believe, the way he just pours it out. Not a bit foolish, either. Every dollar he spends counts, but it takes a mint to put a place like this in order."

"Of course it does; and all the help he has to pay, too. You have n't ever told me what he pays you and Pete, Lucretia."

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"No, and I ain't going to, Cherry, 'cause then when folks ask you, you can say you don't know."

Lucretia's matter-of-fact, pleasant manner deprived her words of offense. "Did you notice that piano downstairs in the settin'-room? Brand new; that's for Elaine; she plays like her fingers had quicksilver in 'em; and she can dance as light as these dandelion blows. I watched her through the crack o' the dinin'-room door the other night. Camilla and Junior was there and she pretended to be dancin' for Junior; but Mr. Ford was there readin' the paper. I'll bet he looked over the top of it a few times. 'Young man,' says I to myself, 'did you ever read about the daughter of Herodias?' think says I. 'That girl don't want your head on a charger, but she wants you to lose it, just the same.'" Lucretia winked and nodded vigorously.

"Hussy!" exclaimed Miss Shanklin, with keen appreciation. "Oh, well, she'd be a good catch, I suppose, — if he can stand her," she added reasonably.

"Don't know what you mean by that. She's sweet-lookin' and sweet-spoken," returned Lucretia, "and she's got faculty, the same as he

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has. They're both the kind that can make old shears cut. She bossed those furniture movers around just as good as he could. She knows what she wants."

"Yes," returned Charity tartly, "and when you're nineteen and pretty you can get it as a usual thing."

But the next evening when the automobile stopped before the parsonage, and the minister and his sister stepped within, Charity had laid aside every sentiment which belied her name. Her brother's face seemed to smooth out as they fled in cushioned luxury through the familiar streets.

Pete Miller endeavored to throw an occasional social remark over his shoulder at the pair in the tonneau, but Charity discouraged this.

"Never mind us, Pete," she said. "Just keep your eyes on the road. We might run over a hen."

Pete grinned complacently. Life had become one round of pleasure. He had conquered this mettlesome steed, and was now learning to run the motor-boat.

Mr. Shanklin's patient heart shared mildly in Pete's exultation. They turned in at the

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elm avenue, and prosperity began to fill the air they breathed. The neglected, down-at-heel place had taken on the air of a finished country residence, and when Mr. and Mrs. Barnes came out on the piazza to greet the guests, and the minister felt the cordial hand-clasp of the proprietor, he began to see visions of paint and a new carpet at the church.

As Charity Shanklin received Mabel's quiet greeting, she regarded her with lively curiosity. The young hostess was dressed in white, and pansies which Junior had picked and presented to her were tucked in the open neck of her gown. There was a kindness and a natural dignity in her manner which disarmed Miss Shanklin, who felt some confusion in her determination not to be hoodwinked.

The old-fashioned front and back parlor had been transformed into a modern living-room, but James Barnes had resisted all temptation to throw out bay windows or additions of any kind.

"You know this is just as new to me as it is to you," he said to the minister. "This little girl of mine and my wife's brother, Victor, have done it all and I don't see how it could be improved, do you?"

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Mr. Shanklin did not; and he felt the same satisfaction with the dinner. With Elaine at the head of the table and her father at the foot, with Camilla and Junior, Victor Ford beside Charity, and the gracious young wife beside himself, this was an occasion when he entirely forgot to question the digestibility of anything, but after he had asked the blessing, accepted all the goods which Bessie provided, and ate everything set before him with a relish.

His sister watched him with amazed interest. "Law! it'll do him good," she thought. "I always did say more folks die for the lack o' good things than from eatin' 'em."

After dinner the party went out on the pond in the smart little boat with its polished brass fittings.

"You remember what I had here as a youngster, Cherry?" asked Mr. Barnes, as they started out. "Oh, of course not. No lady ought to remember back thirty-five years."

"I do and I ain't ashamed of it," returned Charity; "and I remember, too, that you said I was like a cow in the boat and you would n't take me with you."

James Barnes's laugh was heartier than his wife had ever heard it.

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"No excuse either," he returned, "for the boat would have held a cow all right. It was made out of a piano-box, Elaine."

Mabel's heart felt a little sting. She had been such an attentive hostess and expressed all pleasure in every arrangement. If only he would have turned to her.

Camilla saw her catch her lip under her teeth. She knew. She had been watching, and helping both silently and in talks with the young wife, ever since the latter started on the new path up from the valley to the heights.

"I suppose that was very good fun for a boy," returned Elaine, with her charming manner; "but I must say I prefer this, don't you, Cousin Cherry?"

"Well, seeing I was n't let to go in the piano-box, I do," returned Miss Shanklin crisply.

"I suppose Elaine's all right," she thought, "but she's a little too palaver-y for me. I like some vinegar with my oil!"

The lovely evening light slanted from the west on tree and ripple. James Barnes surveyed the scene with tranquil enjoyment.

"If I were back in the old apartment," thought Mabel, "he would look just as happy. I'm only ballast!"

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But she resolutely put aside the thought with the courage of her new philosophy.

"Don't exact. Don't try to dominate," Camilla had said. "Watch your thought. Know where you live: in spirit now — in the atmosphere of Truth and Love, now; know where your strength is; fear nothing; God is Love; Omnipotence that is Love enfolds you; you have n't to fight; you have only to know; there is n't a suggestion of evil that Truth and Love do not banish if you know how to open your mind to them."

All these rays from the light of her new teaching beamed upon her beating heart; and her husband's voice went on:—

"Pretty good little lake for a cranberry bog," he said, with an affectionate sense of possession. "I want to skate here again next winter and see the cranberries once more through the ice."

"You're welcome to," remarked Charity dryly.

"And we'll go sleighing, Cherry!" he added enthusiastically.

"No, we won't," she returned with conviction. "I can sit with my feet in a pail of cold water and ring a dinner bell and it'll do just as well."

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"I'll go sleighing with you, Daddy," said Junior, cuddled up quietly beside Camilla, "and you'll teach me how to skate, too."

"Indeed, I will. We'll start on our skates on the snow crust at the top of the hill by the orchard, and slide faster and faster downhill, across the road, and down the next hill like lightning into the meadow; then when we reach the brook, jump into the air and down on the other side and slide till the steam gives out." James Barnes stopped and laughed. "And people think aeroplaning is exciting! I wonder what my old bones would say if I should try that stunt now!"

Victor Ford, who was running the boat, smiled over his shoulder at the big-eyed small boy.

"I think Junior and I will try that first on a bob sled," he remarked.

"Where do I come in?" asked Elaine.

Charity's eagle eyes observed her as she put the question, a saucy challenge to the man at the wheel.

"Just about where you please, I'll bet," she reflected.

CHAPTER XXI

THE ONLY SON

AFTER the Shanklins had been put into the automobile and started for home, James Barnes and his wife lingered on the piazza.

Long shadows of the elm branches trailed across the terrace in the moonlight, wavering in the breeze of the June evening.

"It seems as if nothing in Old England could be lovelier than this outlook," said Mabel, sinking into one of the piazza chairs, hoping that her husband would be seated: in these days they were never alone together; but he continued to stand, gazing off on the sweep of hillside and meadow, the wooded sky-line, and the pretty stretch of water sparkling in the moon-rays.

"I believe you said your clubs would not hold sessions during the summer," he remarked.

"Yes; and if they did, it would n't matter to me. I have resigned my offices."

Mr. Barnes did not comment on this.

"Do you think you could be happy to stay on here awhile?"

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“Of course, if you can stay.”

“I shall be back and forth all summer.”

“Then I shall come back and forth, too.”

“No; it will soon be hot in town and you will be more comfortable here.”

“Thinking of you in the heat,” returned Mabel quickly. “Oh, no.”

“My dear,” said James Barnes, smiling, not at the attractive white figure leaning back in the moonlight, but at the woods across the brook, “that is the common lot of husbands. I should n’t be more exacting than the rest.”

“You have never been exacting enough,” returned Mabel, steadying her voice as best she could against the gentle, inexorable repulsion of his manner.

He hastened to get away from personalities. “I have a plan I should like to carry out if it won’t incommod you: to let Bessie stay here, give Katie a rest, close the house, and live at the club. You would then divide your time between Elm Farm, and a hotel in town, or some resort. You and Elaine will probably want to dip in the ocean for a few weeks.”

Mabel’s sore heart beat fast. The burden of being dependent on a person who had no use for her seemed at that moment too crushing

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to be borne. She summoned all her fortitude, all her philosophy. Surely the punishment was heavy!

"I must be at home by the last of August." She managed to speak quietly. "I want a month to get the house in shape for Elaine to enjoy when the season begins."

"Are you sure you would n't be as content in a more modern home such as Elaine wants? It would mean much less trouble for you."

"I'll make it very pretty where we are," returned Mabel, something in her throat threatening to choke the words.

"But why do you care about that old dungeon?" The question came a trifle impatiently.

"Because I've been very happy there," answered Mabel quickly.

He glanced around at her. She had straightened up in her chair, her somber eyes were raised to him. Her beauty had always made a strong appeal to him; and she had never looked lovelier than at this minute, from the coronet of her hair to her little slippers feet.

He looked away again quickly. Had n't tenacity always been one of her characteristics? How could he know that she was longing to

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pour out to him that she could n't leave the old home until he had gained happy associations with it? After that, she should care nothing where they lived! Any place from a tent up would do.

"The chances are," he returned, looking back on the landscape, "that you would be happier elsewhere, — and make Elaine happy, too."

Mabel bit her lip, and a sound of gay laughter rippled through the moonlight.

Elaine and Victor came up the hill from the pond where they had remained to put up the boat.

"He says he is my uncle and, therefore, I should obey him," announced the girl.

"I have to have some pull since I'm a farmer and not in her social set," remarked Victor. "By the way, Jim," he added, "I believe that orchard is worth working over."

It had been an easy matter with the present community of their interests, and the familiar name for his brother-in-law dinned in his ears by the neighbors, to drop all formal terms in addressing him.

Elaine seated herself on the piazza step, and Mabel, after listening for a minute to her

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brother's agricultural suggestions, rose unnoticed and disappeared within the house.

She went upstairs and at the top met Camilla. She paused and to the latter's surprise put both arms around her, and the little woman standing one step above her, Mabel leaned her head against the comforting shoulder.

Camilla wondered whether the unprecedented demonstration indicated joy or grief; but as Mabel lifted her head again and the soft light of the hall lamp fell on her pale face and sad eyes, her doubt was at an end.

"Let us go into your room," said Camilla, "and do a little reading."

Mabel followed her into the room back of the nursery which she had insisted should be hers, leaving the front room for Elaine as hostess at the farm.

There they read of the perfect love that casteth out fear until the disquieted soul took fresh courage to meet her problem.

"Let your heart, therefore, be perfect with the Lord," read Camilla. "That is all our part, dear Mrs. Barnes." She looked up from the Bible in her lap. "We have n't to fight. The battle is the Lord's. 'Be still, and know that I am God.' The Bible is full of reminders of

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what our part is. Not inaction, but the quiet of active trust based on the Love revealed to us."

"I don't make any headway," said Mabel.
"I can't see that I make any headway."

"But you do," returned Camilla quickly, "because not one of us can stand still. We're progressing either up or down, and when we take the right track, there's simply no question but that we're on the way to happiness."

She smiled at her companion who silently took her hand.

"The great thing," went on Camilla after a pause, "is not to outline in what our happiness shall consist."

"Yes," returned Mabel with a grave nod, "I should call that a very great step."

But she felt calmer and strengthened when Camilla left her, and she sat by her window that looked out on the mound, its dark cedars black in the moonlight, and over yonder at the forest trees bordering the pond.

Later Camilla knocked on her door and came in again.

"I've been thinking, Mrs. Barnes," she said, "about your husband's plan that you told me of, and I believe it's a good one. He will be

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likely to spend more time out here if the house is closed than if you were there and preparation to come had to be made each time; and this peaceful place will be good for you. I propose that you stay right here now and let me go in town to-morrow morning and make arrangements with Katie and do the few things that need to be done, and pack your trunk and bring it out."

"Whatever you say," returned Mabel. "James and Elaine both want to move in the fall and I am opposing them. I can't leave the old house, Camilla. I can't leave it until it means something different to us; something happier." The speaker covered her face with her hands, and tears forced their way through her fingers.

Camilla came close and put an arm round the white shoulders. "Dear Mrs. Barnes, the fall is a long way off and God is very near, 'nearer than hands and feet,' we are told; and another thing we are told is to 'rejoice always.' It is easy to rise above depression if we persist in letting nothing but the truth reign in our thought. You are on the highroad to happiness," she added slowly, "just as surely as that we are in this room together!"

Mabel threw one arm around the standing

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figure, and kept the other hand over her eyes.

"I've lately had an awful thought, Camilla," she said, "and you can't say that it may not be true. I've thought that my husband, believing our marriage to be a mistake, is thinking about — about dissolving it. He is leading up to talking to me about ways and means. Sometimes I feel the conviction and it — it suffocates me."

Camilla held her close. "I don't believe that," she returned; "but if it were so, you may rest assured that there is no variableness in the rule that right thinking connects you consciously with God, and only right action can follow. You have no responsibility beyond your thought at the present minute."

"But I love him, Camilla, I love him!"

"That's right. Love him. He's your husband. At the same time, there's a verse of a hymn that is good to remember:—

"No good in creatures can be found
 But may be found in Thee;
I shall have all things and abound
 Since God is God to me!"

"Oh, how can I get up there! How could I ever be so impersonal?"

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"It's the way to happiness. It won't make you love less, but more; but your joy then won't be at the mercy of a mortal." Camilla patted the clinging, silent figure.

"Now, I will go in with Mr. Barnes tomorrow morning," she went on. "Bessie can stay here. Katie will help me do everything that is necessary and she can pack Bessie's trunk."

"But what will Junior say?" asked Mabel.

Camilla smiled out at the darkening landscape. "I've done my work very poorly if he does n't agree. Do you dread to be left with the care of him? Bessie will be here. The girl is delighted with the country and wants to stay."

"I dread nothing," returned Mabel quietly, "except —"

"No exceptions," interrupted Camilla cheerfully, giving the sitting figure a little squeeze. "Nothing to dread. Everything to hope. Good-night, dear Mrs. Barnes. Remember, 'Intelligence directs, Divine Love protects, and Mind is unfolding all I ought to know, and to have.'"

The June morning came beautifully into Junior's nursery. There had been a shower in

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the night and he ran to the window to see the diamonds sparkle on the lawn. He called Camilla to see the morning and how thick and deep looked the elm avenue.

"Do we ever have to go back to that old city, Camilla?" he asked, gazing out on what, plus the pony and the dog, was certainly a small boy's paradise.

"Not until we want to," she answered.

"I shan't ever want to," he declared firmly.

She sat down by the window in her kimono and took him on her lap.

"Do you know that Mamabel is going to shut up the house in town, let Katie go and take a rest, and Daddy will stay here part of the time, and part of the time live at his club? Won't it be fun to have him out here so much?"

"Yes, yes," cried Junior in high approval.

"They decided it last night; so we thought it would be a good plan for me to go in town this morning with Daddy" — Junior's expression began to change — "and pack up all the things, because we don't care if we don't see that house again until the snow begins to come down, do we?"

"I'll go with you and Daddy, and help you pack."

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Camilla looked at him with the smiling, compressed lips and roguish eyes that he loved. "And leave Popinjay and Angus? What an idea! I shall come back day after to-morrow."

Junior swallowed. A boy who owned a horse and a dog and whose doll had been given to Camilla could not be a baby; but some of the dew sparkling on the grass was trying to creep into his eyes.

"Let Sister go and pack up," he said after the pause.

"She does n't know much about things at the house after being away such a long time does she?"

"Let Mamabel go," said Junior, feeling the net close around him.

"I wanted to talk to you a little about Mamabel," returned Camilla confidentially. "You're getting to be a big boy now, big enough to understand some grown-up things, and you are Mamabel's son: the only son she has; and sons always take care of their mothers, you know. Have you noticed how quiet Mamabel is, and how gentle? I think something has happened to make her feel sad."

"No," explained Junior earnestly. "I told

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her about the angel that night, and it made her kind."

Camilla nodded and smiled. "Good. You see that was taking care of her. That was being a good son. She has worked hard all winter and she has only white roses in her cheeks. She wants somebody to take care of her and love her, and you remember how busy Daddy always is; but Mamabel's only son has time to take her around and amuse her and make her happy, and show her what's in the brook and let her run with the dog, and smooth Popinjay's nose; and take her in the woods and show her where the flowers grow, until the pink roses come back in her cheeks again. Would n't that be better than sending her off to the dark house to pack?"

Junior looked very sober and his eyes were wide. "Then night will come," he said, at last.

"Yes, and you will invite Mamabel to sleep in my bed, and you'll play her the lovely good-night tune, 'Guten Abend, Gute Nacht,' and in the morning you'll bring her to this window and show her all the beautifulness, because not any sun comes into her window till dinner-time, you know; and think what a good time you'll give her!"

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Camilla had washed the child while she talked, and now she began to dress him. He kept a doubtful silence. He was thinking of Mamabel and how gentle her hand was now when she touched him; and how she kissed him instead of throwing kisses from her fingers, and how she listened to everything he had to tell her, and how like pleasant flowers she smelled when she drew him close to her. Considering the marvelous change he had already wrought in her, perhaps, being her only son, he might brace up to continue the work. But when Camilla put on her tailored suit instead of the little striped cambric dress, he had to swallow hard.

After Mrs. Barnes had gone upstairs the night before, her husband had told Elaine of the plan to close the house for a couple of months, and the girl had assented.

"A very good plan for Mabel, I should think," remarked Victor, from his perch on the piazza rail. "She does n't look well to me."

"She does show the winter strain," returned his brother-in-law pleasantly.

Victor looked off on the moon-flecked sward and back at Elaine sitting on the step, the starlight in her eyes. It seemed to him he never

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looked at this girl without a conscious endeavor to harden his heart. She was so sweet, so winning without, and, he told himself, so calculating, so hard within. She was a good playmate, a good fellow, at moments when he could forget his sister's white face. As he sat there now, James Barnes's courteously indifferent tone ringing in his ears, he considered the strange situation. It seemed to him there had never been a time since last September when he had not carried a sore spot in his heart concerning his sister. If she had caused so much disturbance to him, what ought he to expect from these two who owed her nothing, and to one of whom she owed so much?

James Barnes was one of Nature's noblemen; that he knew; and he had no right to pry into the affairs of his heart. If Barnes had ceased to love his sister by her own faults of selfishness and indifference, love cannot be forced. Victor felt that his brother-in-law would be as direct and honest in lovelessness as he had been in love, and this, of course, was what was undermining Mabel's health and happiness. Many a couple falling out of love managed to jog along, keeping a respectable and contented front to the world. Mabel had never loved her husband. Now a

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tardy gratitude probably possessed her, and as blessings always brighten as they take their flight, she felt ready to move heaven and earth to reawaken the old feeling in which she had basked so indifferently.

Victor had little faith in that reawakening, and he believed in this peaceful country spot, with the brooks, the breezes, and the flowers, and the clean bright air, his sister would find her poise again, for she had never been a loving person, and it was her pride that needed healing from an intense mortification. She expressed more love to himself now than she had ever done in her life. He appeared to have gained great value to her. Very well, he should stand by her. She seemed very lovable to him in her new manner, an appealing mingling of humility and dignity. He knew James Barnes must notice his wife's efforts at reparation. He should suppose they would touch his brother-in-law as they did himself. If they did, Barnes gave no sign of it. He had always been courteous and loyal to Mabel. He was so still. Of course, Victor did not know what had passed between them, but his sister had evidently suffered an earthquake shock and he did not believe a shattered edifice could ever be restored.

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This plan of closing the house met with his entire approval. The less his sister was with her husband for the next three months, the sooner could she come out of her bewilderment, readjust herself, and take up life again. Possibly the thing she had hinted to him was true. Perhaps James Barnes would want a separation. Victor frowned unconsciously as the thought came to him. However, his must be a waiting game.

Mr. Barnes was surprised to find that Camilla instead of his wife was going to accompany him to town that morning. She found him walking on the terrace, Angus bounding about him, and when the collie saw his little master, he ran to him joyously, giving her the opportunity to tell her plan.

"But your shadow! He permits it, eh?" Mr. Barnes looked eager and interested, his eyes following the child and capering dog.

"Yes. We've had a talk, and he agrees that a son should take care of his mother, and that I'm better able to go and do the work than Mrs. Barnes is."

James Barnes's smile died and a line came between his brows, but he put a hand on the little woman's shoulder.

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"Camilla! Miracle-worker," he said. "Why did n't you come to us a year ago?"

"There is a miracle-worker, Jim," she answered, "but it's not I."

"You're as near as I'll ever get to it," he returned.

"This is a test for Junior," she said. "Be sure to take it as a matter of course."

"I was just going to tell you of a surprise I had arranged for him to-day."

"Oh, I'm so glad," replied Camilla eagerly. "Something he can show his mother?"

"Show Mamabel, yes," was the reply; and then James Barnes told her what he had done. "My father was quite a mechanical genius and he made them for me when I was a youngster. Victor and Pete put them in place yesterday in that grove up by the pasture where the hammocks are hung. I expected to take Junior there myself, but there was too much going on, and we arrived too late."

"I'm glad. Don't explain to him. Let me arrange it."

Mamabel and Junior drove to the station with the departing ones. As they stood on the platform waiting, Camilla leaned down to the little boy, with a radiant face.

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"I've found out something lovely," she whispered, — "a big surprise that you can give Mamabel."

Junior was too busy swallowing to do more than cling to her hand in silence.

"You know the grove where the hammocks hang? Well, what do you think! It's a singing grove! The breeze fairies have chosen that special place to sing in. It's quiet now; but when the breeze springs up, you'll know they're going there, and you take Mamabel and see if she won't be surprised at what she hears!"

"I don't want to," replied Junior, with extreme gravity.

"I believe you will when you think about it. Oh, those cunning breeze fairies. Do you suppose they use our hammocks at night? I should n't wonder. I'm pretty glad we've found out where they practice. I have n't heard them yet. You'll take me there day after to-morrow. Here comes the train. I'm going to buy a new collar for Angus. What do you suppose will be engraved on it, right in the metal: 'Angus Second, Property of James Barnes, Junior.'"

How could James Barnes, Junior, owner of a pedigreed collie, descend to tears! However, when Camilla actually kissed him good-bye

The Only Son

and he saw her board the train, the lump that rose in his throat almost refused to be swallowed.

Mabel saw the struggle; saw the wet eyes.

"We don't like to see our dearest ones go away even for a few hours, do we?" she said as they reentered the car and Pete turned toward home. "I'm glad I have you, Junior."

Under this somehow the lump went down; and as soon as the child was sure that no tell-tale drops would well over, he stole a glance up at his stepmother. She did look very white and he felt that his work was waiting for him.

"Yes, you have me," he returned a little tardily. "I'm your only son."

Then suddenly he was charmed with himself, for, quite unexpectedly, a very pretty pink rose bloomed slowly, and deepened in each of Mabel's cheeks. He straightened up, his eyes only a little misty.

"I'm going to take care of you," he added valiantly.

CHAPTER XXII

THE HUSBAND

WHEN the three from the farm reached town, James Barnes went directly to his office, and Elaine and Camilla to the house.

As they entered, Elaine looked about with a clouded brow.

"You seem to have great influence in the family, Camilla," she said. "Can't you persuade Mamabel that it is absurd to spend a lot of money here instead of moving to a desirable place?"

"Things are pretty sure to work out right if we just keep our thought calm and unselfish," replied Camilla.

"You'd better tell Mamabel that. I'm sure it's very selfish of her to insist the way she does. Really I had no idea how ugly this house was till I came home from school."

They were standing in the hall, Elaine casting scornful glances at the high, dingy ceilings.

"Really, Camilla, I mean it," she went on. "You're Daddy's old friend and you should side with us."

The Husband

"Are there sides?" returned Camilla.

"Why, of course. You can see there are. Surely I can speak plainly with you. I fancy Daddy was brought to his senses pretty soon after his marriage. Not that his letters showed it. He ought to have lived 'when knighthood was in flower.'" The hardness under Elaine's smooth tones was audible to her listener. She went on: "Of course, there's nothing to do now but bear it. Appearances must be kept up. I realize that."

"I'm sorry to hear you talk so, Elaine. You have been seeing a good deal of Mrs. Barnes lately. Have you no admiration, no sympathy for her?"

Elaine shrugged her shoulders. "Admiration? Yes, somewhat," she replied; "but why should I have sympathy?"

Camilla's quiet voice lowered. "Can't you see that she is having a struggle?" she asked.

"I daresay," returned Elaine; "but what does she deserve? Why did she marry Daddy? You know why as well as I do; while he married her under an infatuation. Why did she cure him of that infatuation? Surely she was n't very clever. See how obstinate she is about this house? You'd think she might at least be modest and

The Right Track

not set her will against Daddy and me. I see no reason to sympathize with her."

Camilla shook her head. "You will, Elaine, when your hard times come," she answered.

"What do you mean by that? Why should I have hard times?" Elaine gave a little laugh of conscious power.

"Because Life forces us to learn the great lesson if we will not study it voluntarily."

"What lesson?"

"The lesson of Love."

"Oh, dear! I'm not Junior!"

"No. It looks as if he might get far ahead of you."

"Oh, Camilla! What a funny, good little thing you are!" laughed Elaine. "I'll love fast enough when the time comes."

The girl started to run upstairs.

Camilla caught her arm and stayed her.

"The time is now, Elaine; not to love one, but all. You're a pretty, young girl with every temptation to be selfish."

The speaker paused and Elaine looked down into the lovely eyes which had so long mirrored her small brother's heaven. A wave of tenderness for the little woman touched the girl's complacent heart. What in the world had such as

The Husband

Camilla to live for! To think of having no life and joy of one's own; to think of having no hope beyond serving: of smoothing the path of others. The girl knew nothing of that marvelous exhortation: "He that would be greatest among you, let him be the servant of all."

She tolerated Camilla's detaining hand out of genuine pity.

"I suppose I am selfish," she returned. "I don't pretend to be above the average."

"But you should n't be contented with the average. We must all make the pilgrimage upward, sooner or later. How much better to begin now than to wait until forced by suffering."

"How do you want me to begin, Camilla? I don't know what you're talking about."

"I'm talking about unloving thoughts. Every one we entertain is a sin, and should be the only thing we fear."

"I don't know that I am so especially unloving," returned Elaine.

"Loving those who love us, who do things for us, or from whom we hope for something, is n't the love with the large 'L' toward which we must reach. I'm saying this to you on account of Mamabel. Every hard thought you hold toward her adds to her burden."

The Right Track

Elaine shrugged her shoulders again. "What burden has she, pray?"

"The heart knoweth its own bitterness," returned Camilla.

"Well, no burden that she did n't bring on herself, anyway," said Elaine.

"We all bring our burdens on ourselves. Nothing is a burden that has not been at some time an error. Send love to her instead of condemnation every time she comes into your thoughts and you'll be helping her and yourself, too; for condemnation embitters us and shuts the door to Good."

Elaine could not wholly resist the look in the face upturned to her. She leaned over the newel post and took the face between her hands. "Camilla," she said emphatically, "I'm going to try very, very hard not to grow as good as you are!" Then she ran upstairs and Camilla went toward the kitchen to find Katie.

"As if this impossible house was n't enough," thought Elaine, "without sermons preached while you wait."

But Camilla had given an impetus to the girl's thought, and as she laid off her hat and coat she recalled the pale, quiet woman who had come to the station this morning to see them off, and

The Husband

reflected curiously concerning her. Her girlish vanity, on the lookout for signs of subjugation in Victor Ford, pleaded also for Mabel. Elaine discerned an adamantine loyalty to his sister in the young man.

While her thoughts were still busy she noticed a note lying on her dresser. She recognized the writing as Ben Walmsley's, and seated herself to open it.

"DEAR ELAINE," she read: "I'm tired of ringing your doorbell and Katie's tired of seeing me. I understood you to say you were n't going to feed chickens long, so I've been waiting for you to come back. I understand Victor Ford is at Brierly. Have n't seen him for a long time and that explains it. Katie had a message that you are coming in this morning, so I leave this note. Please call me up and tell me when I may see you. I hope the stunning Mrs. Barnes comes in, too. I want to meet her again."

"When did Ben ever see Mamabel?" thought Elaine. "The stunning Mrs. Barnes." Again the girl recalled Mabel and her dignity. She remembered that her stepmother had said, "I need to be forgiven for a good many things." It was not to be gainsaid that she had scarcely more in life than Camilla. She had lost her

The Right Track

chance. Here was a man like Ben Walmsley calling her stunning and wishing to meet her again; and she had married herself to a man with graying hair, who was courteously indifferent to her.

Elaine all at once felt that perhaps she might even allow her stepmother an obstinate possession of this undesirable house if such a forlorn thing could give her any satisfaction.

Then she rose and went to the telephone and made an appointment with Ben Walmsley for the evening.

Camilla's main object in accompanying James Barnes back to town was to get an opportunity to have a talk with him alone. After dinner the three went to the living-room and Elaine sat down at the piano and played from Nocturne to Berceuse and Reverie, in the long, warm twilight.

In the midst of her music the doorbell rang and Ben Walmsley walked in. He was good-looking in a dark, full-lipped, Oriental fashion, and when father and daughter had made him welcome, he was presented to Camilla.

"I came over in the machine, Mr. Barnes," he said. "It's stuffy indoors these evenings. Thought Elaine might like to take a spin."

The Husband

James Barnes looked out of the window at the low, narrow, rakish affair waiting by the walk.

"Don't know about that," he replied. "When did you get pinched last, Ben?"

The young fellow's smile flashed white. "Word of honor, Mr. Barnes, I'll go like a maiden lady walking to church."

"And be back by dark," added James Barnes.

"Daddy, that's a half an hour," objected Elaine with her prettiest drawl.

"Well, take care of her, anyway, Ben, and be back in an hour."

"Oh, we can girdle the earth in an hour," returned the young man, watching Elaine with admiring eyes as she hurried away to get her motor veil.

"None of that. That's just what I object to in your driving. How's your mother?"

"Fine. She sent her regards and wants you and Mrs. Barnes and Elaine to dine with us next Thursday."

"Thank her and tell her we're closing the house. You know, perhaps, I've bought a farm in Brierly. The family are moving out and I'll be the only one in town. I'll come to dinner Thursday if she'll have me. I suppose she'll be going to Maine soon."

The Right Track

"Yes, first of the month." A pause. "I have n't heard you invite me out to the farm, Mr. Barnes."

"You'll have to apply to Elaine. She's the chatelaine there. Fact is," James Barnes laughed, "when we're all there, guests may have to sleep in the barn or the attic."

"Can't scare me that way," responded Ben; and Elaine appearing in the doorway in a pale silk motor coat and veil, he rose.

"Now, then, at nine o'clock," said Mr. Barnes, "I want to see that untamed steed of yours, Ben. Don't forget."

"Right O. Au revoir," and the young people went laughing out of the open door and down the steps.

"That boy's mother is one of the finest women on earth," remarked James Barnes, as he and Camilla stood at the window and watched the departure. "I hope he is a comfort to her. A widow with money and an only son has to mind her *p*'s and *q*'s not to spoil him."

"That was the way I persuaded Junior to stay in Brierly and let me come away," said Camilla. "I reminded him that he was Mama-bell's only son and must take care of her."

James Barnes met his friend's smiling gaze

The Husband

for a moment as they turned away from the window.

"The little chap had a fight," he returned; "but he was game. You're a wizard. What are we going to do with ourselves, Camilla, until a proper time to yawn? How would you like to go to the 'Movies'? Some right around the corner."

"What would you do if I were n't here?"

"Hang about until I saw that sinuous little devil of a machine bring Elaine home, and then — I don't know."

"All right, then, we have an hour to talk."

"People are sitting on the steps all up and down the street. Shall we take out some cushions?"

"Why not stay right here?" suggested Camilla. "The breeze comes in nicely."

So James Barnes arranged a couple of chairs near the window.

"May I smoke?"

Camilla assenting, he placed a cushion under her feet, and lighting his cigar, took the opposite armchair. When, he wondered, had he last sat down in this room for a smoke and a chat!

"Now, then," he said, settling himself comfortably, "now let's go back thirty years."

The Right Track

"No, let's not go back even a week. Let the dead past bury its dead."

"Don't want to bury it. It was good stuff."

Camilla smiled. "Well, the present is better stuff. Let's talk of the present."

"That's good stuff, too," responded her companion. "Katie likes the plan of a vacation. We like the farm. Junior is getting firmly on his legs. Everything's lovely and 'the goose hangs high.' The present is quickly disposed of. You don't know enough about farming to be interested in what Victor plans about apples. Say, Camilla, why don't we go for a drive? Let me call up the garage and let Dick bring the car around."

As he spoke Barnes started to rise, but Camilla leaned forward quickly and put out her hand. "Sit still, Jim. I know you don't want me to talk about it; but I must speak to you of your wife."

James Barnes leaned back again in his chair. "Any other subject, Camilla," he said. "Not that."

"I ask you as a favor to listen to me."

"Did she ask you to speak to me?" The speaker's face had changed and the deep line came in his forehead.

The Husband

"No; nor anything approaching it."

"Then, don't, Camilla. No third person can help in a problem between husband and wife."

Camilla bit her lips. "You make me feel intrusive," she said; "but besides being husband and wife you are human beings, children of God and my brother and sister, and you are unhappy."

"I'm not unhappy, Camilla," declared Barnes quickly.

"That's a lie, Jim," she said quietly. "You deceived me for a time, but I've seen since that you are quite as unhappy as she is."

James Barnes's face flushed and he tapped the ashes from his cigar into a receiver. There was a brief silence, which he broke.

"I owe you my boy's life, and that makes you a privileged character. You are the only person in the world to whom I would listen or explain. You're the salt of the earth, Camilla, but, believe me, you are utterly incapable of understanding this situation; so now let's drop the subject right here."

"No, we'll not drop it," returned Camilla bravely. "You say I am privileged to speak, so let me tell you that your wife loves you, Jim."

The Right Track

He leaned forward, his elbows resting on the arms of his chair, and smiled directly into Camilla's pleading eyes.

"You kind-hearted little Camilla," he said. "Can't those clear eyes of yours see the difference between love and remorse? Mabel is suffering more than she need, scourging herself more than she need. That is a stage we can't avoid; but it will soon be over. She is young and recuperative, and has her life to live yet. I can't bear that you who have redeemed me from utter despair should suffer needlessly; so trusting to your absolute honor I will tell you that I have no idea of allowing the present state of affairs to drag on indefinitely. In a condition of emotional insanity I married the girl, my wish being father to the thought that she could and would respond to me. The hope was inexorably crushed, and, thank God, the wish has gone with it."

"Oh, Jim! Jim!" breathed Camilla, turning pale.

The low, quiet voice continued: "Some day Mabel will meet the right man."

"Jim!"

"And when that day comes she will already be free. I have consulted my lawyer —"

The Husband

"Jim!" Camilla's eyes were wet.

"And I know just what to do and when to do it. I am waiting for Mabel to recover herself before I tell her of my plans."

"God help her!" breathed Camilla devoutly. "Only Omnipotence can help her to bear this terrible thing."

"This merciful thing, Camilla; merciful both to her and to me. It has been easy for her to deceive you."

"There's not a particle of deceit in her!"

"Because in her remorse she deceives herself. Why, look at me, dear little friend. Look at the iron entering into my hair. Look at my disappearing waist line. What does a girl of thirty want of me except to do her duty? I met Ben Walmsley on the street the other day and he went into eulogy of my beautiful wife. He saw her at Florio's one night and several times since, it seems. Ben's old enough for her himself. She should have a gallant young lover like him, and she will have."

Camilla listened with wide eyes and parted lips. She felt herself trembling, and she rose.

"Oh, Jim," she said, "this is terrible. You're right. I can't contend with such a situation; but the Father of us all can and will. With

The Right Track

God all things are possible; and Mrs. Barnes has learned how to look to Him. He will take care of her. She wants no gallant young lover. She wants you."

"Enough of that, Camilla," returned James Barnes harshly. He had risen when she did and stood facing her. "That's dangerous talk; and I'm glad I'm not sentimental enough to be taken in by it. Now, I've talked to you frankly because of my tremendous obligation and regard and respect; but it's the last time; and I request that you never reopen the subject. You have had no opportunity and I every opportunity to know the real facts. Mabel has deceived you because she is deceiving herself, and I'm sorry that you're drawn into our problem. There was no need of that, but it is the natural result of her selfishness."

"Those are hard words, James Barnes," returned Camilla with heat, and her eyes glowed. "May you find more mercy in your time of need than you grant."

She stood for a moment more, meeting his impenetrable gaze; then she turned suddenly and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE SINGING GROVE

ON the ride home to the farm that morning, Junior's sense of responsibility deepened as he occasionally glanced up at his stepmother's face. She had put her arm around him when he stated that he was her only son, and had looked very rosy for a minute, but the roses faded quickly and her face fell into its still whiteness.

Camilla had left Mamabel in his care, and as the motor sped up the village street his little brain was busy thinking up ways and means of making those pink roses stay, and making her eyes glad.

Mabel became conscious of his upward glances and recalled her wandering thoughts.

Looking down into his serious face she smiled, considering the marvelous recuperative power of childhood and the total change which had come over the little boy's physique since Camilla first appeared in the Barnes household.

"Do you like ponies and dogs?" he asked, responding to the recognition in her eyes.

"Very much indeed," she answered.

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The reply was disconcerting. Junior had hoped she would prove indifferent.

"You see," he said, "Popinjay was my birthday present. So was Angus. It is n't polite to give away birthday presents, is it?"

"Oh, no, indeed."

"I think Daddy would get you a pony and a dog if you want them."

Mabel gave him a little squeeze. "There are other things I'd so much rather have," she answered.

Junior mentally ran over the list of his possessions.

"Is it anything I have?" he asked.

His stepmother caught her lip under her teeth.

"Yes, dear,—you have heaps of it," she answered.

Junior was silent. He did not wish to make rash promises; but consider as he would, he could not think of anything of which he possessed heaps except toys. Would a grown-up lady care for marbles and toys and trains and boats?

When the motor stopped before the house he was still considering.

"When'll you want to go for your ride, Junior?" asked Pete as they left the car.

The Singing Grove

The boy looked up at Mabel. Her white veil had fallen off.

"I'm going to stay with Mamabel this morning," he replied.

Mabel began to perceive that she was on his mind.

"Oh, Popinjay does n't want to stay shut up in the stable all the morning," she protested cheerfully, and at this moment the collie came galloping madly around the corner of the house. "I'm going to sit right out here under the trees and sew and watch you ride," she went on. "I'll go in and get my work."

"I'm going to have a pony-cart after a while and then I'm going to take you riding," returned Junior.

"Fine! That will be lots of fun." And Mabel went into the house. When she came out again with her books and her work, Junior's short legs were astride the little pony, and Pete was running along beside him down toward the avenue.

Lucretia, who had conceived an extreme admiration for Mrs. Barnes, came out of the house to arrange her table and the hammock chair under one of the sentinel elms.

"Pete works as hard as Popinjay," remarked Mabel.

The Right Track

"Does me good to see him," replied Lucretia grimly. "Pete's lazy by nature and the livery was just turnin' him into one o' these — hossified men. That's what they call 'em, ain't it, when they can't move hand or foot? I s'pose 'cause they let hosses do everything for 'em. When he was drivin' the livery, he used to think he was dreadful smart, askin' me if I wanted him to run alongside the hoss; and now he's actially come to it; it just does me all the good in the world to see him have to hump himself."

Lucretia smiled heartlessly.

"I think it hurts Junior's dignity very much not to be allowed to go alone," returned Mabel, as she leaned back in the hammock chair and Lucretia placed the table conveniently at her elbow. "I heard him asking his father this morning if he might not go alone."

Lucretia sniffed. "I hope he'll be slow enough learnin' to get Pete well shaken up," she returned. "Now you got everything you want, Mis' Barnes?"

As she asked it Lucretia glanced sharply at the books Mabel was placing on the table. One was a Bible.

"Queer doin's, readin' the Bible in the mornin'," thought Lucretia, as she walked back to

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the house. "Wonder if she's afraid she's goin' to die. She's got kind of a queer, far-off look. I'd rather see her have a novel there or something natural for a young, pretty woman to be readin'." Lucretia shook her head. "I'll never be married, and if I was, I s'pose I'd never know how rich married folks act. P'raps 't ain't stylish for two folks to sleep in the same room; but it does seem queer to me that Jim Barnes likes the south attic better'n his wife's pretty chamber. Says he likes to see the descendants o' the hang-birds he used to watch nestin' when he was a boy. It'll come pipin' hot pretty soon and then I guess he'll come down off the perch, scootin'." Lucretia shook her head again. "There's something there I don't understand. There's a way she looks at him that I don't understand. Perhaps it's the reason she reads the Bible on a sightly summer mornin'. If I thought Jim Barnes was n't good to that sweet girl after he's married her, I don't believe I could contain myself."

Bessie was putting away the silver when Lucretia entered the house and the older woman looked at her curiously, half minded to ask a few questions of a girl who had been with the Barneses all their married life; but an unnamed

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loyalty restrained her. Lucretia had silently adopted Mabel Barnes.

When Junior's activities were over and Pop-injay was tethered in the pleasant meadow, he returned to his stepmother and found her reading. All of the enchantment and none of the enervation of summer was in the air. The miles and miles of turquoise sky with its islands of fleecy cloud, the rich verdure of rolling acres of turf, the June leafage of graceful elms, their tassels swaying in a fresh breeze, and joyous bursts of melody from robin and oriole surrounded her.

Mabel pressed her book against her closed eyes. "Dear Father in heaven, forgive me," she breathed against the pages. "I have everything in the world that I don't want."

Here Junior approached. He saw her sudden movement. It was an unhappy movement. With recollection he realized that he was neglecting his business. Now, which of his toys could it be that Mamabel wanted!

Angus, with red mouth panting, stretched his white-and-gold body on the cool turf. He worked as hard as Pete when the young master rode abroad.

"Was it a good ride?" asked Mabel, dropping

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her book and smiling into the big serious eyes fixed upon her.

"Yes." The child came close to her side and pressed against her pale pink gown. "What is it that I have that you want, Mamabel?"

"Nothing, darling. I don't understand you."

"Yes, you said you did. You said I had heaps."

Mabel remembered. "Oh, yes, so I did; but it's nothing you can give me."

Something stirred in the child's heart at the look in her face.

"Yes, I can, Mamabel. I can give away my own things — when they're not birthday presents. I'll give you whatever you want." She took hold of his hand, and he suddenly felt that he loved her very much indeed. "Even if it's" — the words stuck a little and he swallowed — "even if it's my yacht, you can have it."

Mabel kissed the cheek so near her with a cooing sound of appreciation. The yacht was a full-rigged little boat to sail on the pond when Uncle Victor or some other grown-up had time to coöperate. Here was a sacrifice, indeed!

"It is n't the yacht, darling, thank you. Sup-

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posing I wanted your rosy cheeks — your health."

"But don't you feel well, Mamabel?"

"Not all the time. You see there's health, and happiness, and love, and things like that, that you might have heaps of and yet you could n't give them away, could you?"

"Well," Junior's eyes questioned her with round eagerness, "then why don't you ask God? He has enough of everything good for everybody. Camilla says so."

Mabel's arm encircled the speaker closely.

"That's what I'm trying to learn to do, Junior; but first you have to know God, and then you have to ask Him 'aright.' That's the hard part, when you have never known Him, and when you don't know how to put your own will down and ask Him 'aright.'"

Junior nodded as one having experience. "Yes, I used to kick instead," he remarked. After a pause he added: "What is it you want, Mamabel? I'll help you ask."

"Oh, Junior, you can't help me, dearest. Nobody but God can help me; and He has helped me in giving me your love. You do love me a little, don't you?"

"Of course I do," returned the child, feeling

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very protective, "and I'm going to show you things and make you happy. Let's go down to the brook."

"Very well." Mabel prepared to leave the hammock chair, and she folded her neglected sewing deep into a silk workbag and left it on the table.

Angus stopped panting for a moment and looked to see what was doing. How warm he still was from running. How soft and cool the turf in the elm shade! Why must humans be so restless! There the two went, down the hillside toward the brook. Angus really hated to leave this certain good; but the harrowing thought that he might miss something was too much for his doggish heart, and gathering himself up again, panting, he loped after his master.

In a clump of tall hazel bushes, a rustic seat had been placed. "I did n't know this was here," said Mabel. "What a pretty surprise."

Junior beamed with satisfaction. "You can sit here and sew sometimes," he said; and he stood by his companion while she tried the bench, leaning back and watching the brook, whispering and gurgling almost at her feet as it hurried to the meadow.

"And here's a lot of peppermint," said Junior,

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stooping and breaking off sprigs of the mint that grew thickly at the edge of the water.

"How good it smells," said Mabel, pressing it in her palms and inhaling it as the pleased child watched her.

"Perhaps I can find you a turtle. I found one yesterday." Junior stooped on hands and knees by the brook. "They're black and have gold spots all over them; those are the gentle ones. Pete told me to look out for the snappers; but they're the prettiest. Their under shells are bright red ivory and some are white ivory, and I want to find 'em. I'll give 'em a stick to bite."

The little boy went up and down the bank, and lay on his stomach, the better to inspect the rippling stream; but the turtles were coy, and at last he grew tired of the search, to Angus' sincere regret. The dog had curled under Mabel's bench, and now reluctantly dragged himself forth as Junior again put his hand in Mamabel's and led her down the brookside to where a couple of boards were placed across the water.

"Uncle Victor says we'll have a little bridge put here soon; but don't be afraid, Mamabel. I'll help you across."

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Mabel smiled and allowed herself to be carefully convoyed over the ripples of water a foot deep.

The grassy path they came into led to the woodland, and through it, by a comparatively short cut, to the village. Here four months ago the arbutus had braved the snow with its rose, and fragrantly foretold the spring.

Before the stone-walled path was lost in deep woods, a little shaded square of ground came into view on the left. Mabel looked and saw two tombstones. The wall stopped abruptly and she stepped into the little burying-ground. The earth was covered with a mat of leaves of lily-of-the-valley. In the shade and moisture even on this June day sprays of white bells were still clinging about the mossy stones.

The silence was unbroken even by the brooklet's murmur. Mabel went close to the stones and examined the moss-grown letters. "It's my great-grandfather and my great grandmother," explained Junior.

Mabel deciphered the names; then she stood up in the shade of a stately spreading pine and looked down at the carpet of long green leaves, which had been such a glorious gathering of lily bells two weeks before.

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"What peace!" she exclaimed softly, clasping her hands together. "What peace!"

Junior watched her complacently. It certainly was pretty good fun to show Mamabel things, she enjoyed them so much.

Suddenly his stepmother kneeled down before him in the lilies and took hold of his hands, and appealed to him with dark eyes: "Junior, you're a very little boy to be expected to remember things," she said; "but will you try to remember, if — if anything happens to me — you know people do fall ill sometimes, and — and die, and if I should, will you tell — tell Daddy that this is where I should like to lie — here under the lilies?"

Junior's face grew slowly scarlet under her beseeching eyes. His heart beat fast and he wished for Camilla. A surging, half fear, half grief, rose in his throat, and he pulled his hands away from her clinging grasp.

She saw his disturbance and quickly repented.

"I should n't have said that, dear," she exclaimed in a changed tone. "Forgive me. Mamabel gets very tired sometimes and this looks like such a sweet place to rest."

"I should think you'd know that nobody

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dies," returned Junior, swallowing hard,— "they just go on living and—and loving everybody—and—and having a good time."

"I like to have you remind me of those things," returned Mabel. The flushed face and moist eyes rebuked her. "I ought to remember them always." She rose. "I wonder if we can't find some squirrels if we go into those woods," she said cheerfully. "I love to see them scamper up and down the trees, don't you? I never lived in the country till now and there are lots of things you can show me."

Her words reminded Junior of Camilla's parting information, and though his heart still beat a little fast, he took his companion's offered hand and led her on into the woods.

She did the talking for a few minutes.

"Let's come here next winter when the snow is deep. Would n't it be fun? The squirrels will be all sleeping cuddled up in their warm nests, or nibbling the nuts they packed away for winter; but the brave rabbits will go scuttling over the snow winking their little tails. What do you suppose they find to eat?"

"We—we could bring them something," suggested Junior.

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"Yes, would n't it be fun to bring them a feast! Let's see, what would they like!"

"My jumping rabbit has a carrot in his mouth."

"Yes, carrots, and nice little tender cabbage leaves, and lettuce."

By the time the rabbit menu was completed, Junior was gay again.

"I have something else to show you," he announced.

"I'm so glad. I love surprises."

"Well, we have to go this way," and Junior led his companion back past the lilies-of-the-valley to the brook where they crossed again on the narrow boards, Angus following. They went up the hillside past the mound at the left of the house and over toward the woods that bordered the pond. Here was a grove of oaks and pines and they had to go through a gap in a stone wall to enter it. There were two hammocks hung among the trees where one could lie and watch the blue water glinting amid the foliage.

"This is my horse," cried Junior, breaking away from Mabel's hand and springing astride the long, low bough of an ancient pine, which sprang flexibly beneath his light weight and al-

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lowed him to bound up and down in an exciting gallop. He was in the midst of this breakneck race, and Mabel had just sunk comfortably into one of the hammocks, when a soft strange sound began to float through the tops of the sighing pines. It swelled to harmony, diminished, and seemed about to die away.

Junior reined in his mettlesome steed and sat still, while Mabel half raised herself in the hammock and gazed at him.

"How lovely!" she said. "Is that the surprise?"

It certainly was; but as the harmonies did not die away, but swelled to still greater volume than before, the surprise overwhelmed the showman, who dismounted from his charger and came close to Mamabel, and her arm in its short pink sleeve went around him.

"What is it, Junior, what is it?" she exclaimed softly and delightedly, while the boy's cheeks grew very red and his eyes big, in spite of a heroic endeavor to be nonchalant.

"Oh — oh, nothing much," he replied after a pause, while the wind harmonies whispered and sighed and swelled as the ripples of the pond rushed landward in the breeze.

"How could you wait to bring me here, dear?

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Is n't it the loveliest thing to lie here and listen? I can't imagine what makes those sweet sounds."

"I know," remarked Junior, his awe and surprise slowly submerged in a satisfactory sense of superiority. At the same time he liked Mamabel's encircling arm, for the harmonies coming from nowhere and sighing, swelling, and fading were a trifle uncanny.

"The name of these woods is the 'singing grove.' Did you know that?" he asked.

"Indeed, I did not. Tell me more."

"Do you know who's singing?"

"No. Do you?"

"Of course I do. It's only the breeze fairies. Here's where they practice singing."

"Why, Junior, that's wonderful," replied Mabel, half laughing. "Why did n't you tell me about this before?"

Junior did not care to admit how recent was his own information. He preferred to patronize Mamabel.

"I told you I'd make you have a good time," he said. "This is the singing grove where the breeze fairies come every day to practice. Do you like it?"

"I love it," responded Mabel, and drawing the child a bit closer, she kissed the rosy cheek.

CHAPTER XXIV

GUTEN ABEND, GUTE NACHT

THEY told Uncle Victor about it at the dinner-table, and as he had helped to place the Æolian harps in the trees, he was much entertained by his sister's sincere curiosity as to the source of the sounds and Junior's complacent knowledge of everything in general and breeze fairies in particular.

The little boy related how these airy beings used to sweep and clean his bedroom in town and how much they preferred the country to the city when summer came.

Victor was glad of the child's prattle, inasmuch as he saw that it entertained Mabel. The young man's eyes strayed often and anxiously to his sister's face. Why should she look so ethereal? She had always been strong. Jim Barnes was not a man to show a woman any unkindness. Surely she would settle down now in this healthful place, see her husband not more than once a week, and get hold of herself again. Victor made up his mind to take her

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driving every day; and he found himself hoping that she and Elaine would come to understand one another better and better; but he arrested this thought with a frown. "I'm the biggest fool at large to let that girl influence me," he reflected. "I know well enough that nothing on earth would persuade me to marry her even if I had the price. I don't want her and I won't have her."

The form of this resolution arose from Elaine's own behavior, which was always colored with laughing, conscious power and implied that there could be but one end to their companionship. He seemed to himself to be always struggling against meshes which he could neither see nor feel, but which she knew were there and triumphantly recognized as binding him.

In the afternoon Junior had another ride on Popinjay, while Mabel sewed under the elms. While she was at work, she saw a woman's figure plodding up the avenue, and as it came nearer she perceived that she was about to have a caller, and folding up her sewing, she was ready to rise from her chair and greet Miss Shanklin.

"I came to make my party call," observed the latter, panting a little; "but I did n't know

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whether there'd be any one to make it on but Lucretia."

Mabel placed another chair for the visitor, who looked at it doubtfully.

"I guess I'm too warm to sit outdoors," she said.

"We'll go in," responded the hostess, and led the way to the house. "This pretty room gets very much neglected," she added as they entered. "We live out of doors."

"Mosquitoes'll be around pretty soon," remarked Miss Shanklin, "but you're pretty high here and away from the trees." She looked at Mabel as she took her chair. This was certainly luck to get the second Mrs. Barnes alone for a visit!

"I saw little Jim as I came along," went on the caller. "He certainly has everything to make a boy happy." Miss Shanklin heaved a sigh. "I was wishin' poor Lucy could see him!"

"Lucy?" inquired Mrs. Barnes.

"Yes. His mother. She was my cousin, you know. You won't mind my sighin' when I think about her. She was Jim's first love and they got married when he did n't have much of any money, and then Elaine was born — a kind

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of spindlin' baby she was; then the next two they lost; then Junior came along and poor Lucy gave way. Of course, when I see this beautiful place and the motors and the yachts and the ponies and all the things money will buy, I can't help thinking of poor Lucy and how she'd have enjoyed it all."

Mabel felt there was an inimical note underneath this, but her mortal sorrow made petty resentment impossible.

"It is strange," she returned, "how many lives we live in one. I suppose Mr. Barnes does not seem to himself at all like the man who married your cousin."

Miss Shanklin gave the speaker a sharp glance.

"Besides," went on Mabel, "you have no cause to pity her. She had the most precious things in life—the things that money won't buy."

"Well," remarked the caller with a sniff, "I s'pose so; but folks that have n't been poor don't know what it means."

"I have been poor and I know all about it," returned Mabel with the same calm. "I used to fear and hate poverty, but it would have no terrors for me now. When one has lived longer,

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one finds how far down the line of things to be desired, money has a place."

"Well, I don't know," returned Miss Shanklin, unconvinced, but mightily curious, as she gazed at her hostess, taking in the details of her pale-pink cotton gown, the black coronet of her hair, and the buckles on her little slippers.

"That woman ain't happy," she reflected. "Wonder if she's sorry she married Jim? Most likely she means she'd be glad to have her freedom and her poverty back again."

"Camilla has gone to town," went on Mabel. "She is taking the care of closing the house."

"Oh, that's what you're goin' to do," returned Miss Shanklin. "Jim goin' to stay out here?"

"Part of the time here, and the rest at his club."

"I hope he'll make out to get a lot o' time at the farm, and get filled up with it, as you might say. He's just crazy about it and has been for years. As we get along we do find there ain't anything so satisfyin' as the old friends and the old associations."

"I suppose so," returned Mabel mechanically, and the delicacy of her face suddenly impressed Charity Shanklin.

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"Dear me," thought the latter. "I wonder if Jim Barnes is goin' to lose his second? Looks to me as if she did n't care much whether she stayed or not."

Here Junior clattered up the piazza steps and into the room. He paused at sight of the visitor, who stretched out a welcoming hand in a gray cotton glove.

"Come here, little Jim — or Junior, I believe they call you. Come and kiss Cousin Cherry and tell me about your ride. My, how he does look like Lucy! She had those big gray eyes. I remember just how they shone under her white veil the day she was married."

"Go to Miss Shanklin, dear," said Mabel, as Junior hung back, his gaze somber.

"No Miss Shanklin about it," declared the visitor persuasively. "I'm his Cousin Cherry. He knows that, don't you, little man?"

Urged by his stepmother's encouraging hand, Junior stepped forward and permitted the caller to kiss his cheek. She tried to lift him to her lap, but he slid away and back to Mamabel's side. Mabel put her arm around him and Miss Shanklin watched the mute signs of their friendship.

"Are you tired, Mamabel?" asked the child,

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some sign in her unsmiling face impressing him. "You can lie down on the divan."

Charity caught the solicitous note in the boy's voice, and at the same moment Lucretia appeared at the open door with a glass on a tray.

"I've been lookin' outdoors for you, Mis' Barnes. Here's an eggnog I want you should drink. I took notice you did n't eat enough dinner for a bird. Howdy do, Cherry?"

Mabel looked up gratefully at Lucretia.

"What will you bring Miss Shanklin and Junior to keep me in countenance?"

"How about ginger ale, Cherry? Like some?" inquired Lucretia sententiously.

"Well, I *am* kind o' hot still," admitted the caller, folding her gray gloved hands and settling back more comfortably in her chair.

"Then, thank you, Lucretia, you're very good, and I shall enjoy this." Mabel took the brimming, creamy, yellow glass. "You go with Lucretia, Junior, and bring back the ginger ale for your Cousin Cherry and yourself."

The ginger ale helped out the remainder of the call wonderfully, and finally Miss Shanklin took her leave. It was about time for Pete to go for the mail, so Mabel arranged for the caller to go home in the motor. She stood on

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the piazza with Junior, and they watched the car glide down the incline and enter the elm avenue. Miss Shanklin was leaning back luxuriously in the tonneau.

"I do declare," she thought. "Jim don't have much luck with his wives. Looks to me as if that woman was goin' into a decline. I'll bet Lucretia thinks so too, with her eggnogs."

Junior gazed reflectively after the motor.

"I hope she won't come any more," he remarked.

"Why is that, dear?" asked Mabel.

"She makes a wet spot on my cheek when she kisses me. She did it yesterday, too."

Mabel smiled and pressed him to her.

"That's better than leaving a hurt spot in your heart," she answered.

"She can't get at my heart," returned the child stoutly.

"That's the best way," said Mabel. "We must n't let people get at our hearts too easily."

After supper that night, Uncle Victor, who had been busy all day with his orchard plans, took them out in the motor-boat, Lucretia and Bessie as well, and they all watched the sun set behind the winding reaches of the little tree-bordered lake.

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Junior led them home through the singing grove, but the breeze had gone down with the sun and Uncle Victor professed great incredulity as to the wonder-tales his companions related.

"But you must believe the word of a gentleman!" said Junior with flushed cheeks.

"True, true," replied Victor. "I forgot that."

"And to-morrow," added Mabel, "we will bring him and let him hear for himself. Let's climb all the trees, Junior, till we find the fairy chorus perching in the branches and fluttering their little rainbow wings."

"We never can see them," declared Junior with conviction. "They just fan our cheeks and — and puff all around, and —" A tremendous yawn finished his sentence.

Victor looked at his sister, a pale, smiling wraith, moving among the trees. She did not seem liable to climb them. She led her little boy to the house and up to the nursery. The associations of the pretty room beset Junior, as they entered.

"Camilla will be here to-morrow night," he said.

- A large smiling doll sat in one of the chairs clad in her nightdress.

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"Camilla did n't have time to dress Miss Rosalind this morning," he remarked.

"You should have asked me if you wanted your doll dressed," said Mabel.

"She is n't mine," responded the little boy quickly. "I gave her to Camilla. I'm seven, you know."

"Surely. Well, she's very pretty. I'm sure Camilla enjoys her."

"She does. She hugs her and kisses her," remarked Junior, endeavoring to speak loftily.

"Why, you dear Miss Rosalind, you've been neglected to-day," and Mabel took up the doll and held it mother-wise against her breast, pressing her pale cheek to the hard roses in the bisque face.

Junior looking on with interest yawned again prodigiously.

Mabel put the doll back in the chair.

"What lovely windows you have, dear!" She approached and looked out on the moonlit sward and the heavy foliage of the full-leafed avenue.

Junior remembered Camilla's comments and directions as to how he should entertain Mama-bel.

"Yes, the dew is coming down out there,"

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he explained, joining Mabel at the window. "Do you see those fireflies in the meadow? They're hanging the dewdrops on all the grass, and in the morning when the sun rises, it'll sparkle like everything. You'll see."

"Don't we live in a wonderful place!" said Mabel, beginning to undress the child, her unaccustomed fingers assisted by his directions.

When at last he stood in his little pajamas, he ran to the Victrola and pulled out a familiar record.

"What are you going to play, Junior?" Mabel dreaded the music. All the potentialities for happiness here made her lot seem the harder.

"The good-night song," he replied, winding the machine and placing needle and record with experienced swiftness.

Mabel moved to the window and rested her brow against the sash. Madam Schumann-Heinck's warm, gracious voice filled the still, softly lighted room with the familiar song. There was promise of peace in that "Guten Abend, Gute Nacht."

Trust on. Be not afraid. Only believe. It seemed to Mabel the vast starlit sky and the quiet harmonies were touching her with a com-

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fort in which the excitement she dreaded could find no place.

When the song was finished, she turned to Junior, who was perched on the edge of his bed.

"Do you say your prayers now?" she asked.

"Yes. To Camilla, I do."

"I'd like you to let me hear them if you don't mind."

"All right," replied Junior, yawning again.

He said his prayer and then jumped into bed.

"Do you want to hear my verses, too?" he asked in a generous mood.

"Yes, dear. What verses?"

"It was when I thought there were things to be afraid of," explained Junior. "Camilla taught them to me, so I could say them before I went to sleep. She likes to have me say them always, but, of course, I know now that God's in the room all the time, and nothing bad can get in."

Mabel lay down on Camilla's bed, and came close to the child.

"Tell me the verses, dear. There's nothing I want so much as not to be afraid."

"All right. There's two of them." Junior paused again to yawn widely.

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“You can learn them yourself, Mamabel, and then you won’t be afraid.”

He began: —

“‘Fear thou not, for I am with thee. Be not afraid, for I am thy God. I will help thee; yea, I will strengthen thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness.’”

The child’s voice paused, then went on: —

“‘For God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.’”

“Can’t you learn those, Mamabel?” he asked sleepily.

She made some response; then she felt Junior move restlessly and half raise himself from the bed, looking out into the room.

“What do you want, dear?”

“Oh — nothing,” he answered, dropping back on the pillow. After a little hesitation he added: “Miss Rosalind usually goes to sleep in Camilla’s bed.”

“Oh, yes,” returned Mabel readily, “and she has had very little attention to-day.”

She rose and, getting the doll, brought it to the little boy, who turned his face to the wall, to accent his indifference to childish things. Mabel leaned over and kissed his cheek and he

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turned back and, putting his arms around her neck, kissed her heartily. She slipped the doll into the bed, and moved away, to the moon-lighted window.

Junior fell asleep promptly, but when Mabel herself was ready for bed, she found his arm around the rosy doll.

CHAPTER XXV

A WAY OUT

CAMILLA returned the next afternoon. Victor, who with Junior had driven to the station to meet the train, looked beyond her as she descended to the platform.

"Elaine did n't come?" he asked, displeased.

"No. Mr. Walmsley persuaded her to stay over for the couple of days that the house is still to be open."

"Walmsley? What Walmsley?"

Camilla, endeavoring to straighten herself from Junior's strangle hold, was struck by the fierceness of the young man's tone.

"Mr. Ben Walmsley is his name."

Victor's frown was Jove-like and he stood still on the platform, holding Camilla's suitcase.

"I did n't know they were friends," he announced.

"It seems that they've known each other from childhood," said Camilla. "His mother is one of Mr. Barnes's closest friends."

Victor looked over the speaker's head at a

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series of mental pictures in which Ben Walmsley figured conspicuously. They were unpleasing pictures and he condemned them sweepingly, especially in connection with a young, innocent girl like Elaine Barnes. The irritating feature of the memories was that reminiscence revealed himself neck and neck with Ben in all of these mental canvases.

"Are n't we going home, Uncle Victor?" asked Junior, clinging to Camilla's hand and hopping up and down with satisfaction.

"Yes, yes, of course," returned Victor, coming to himself and leading the way to the car.

Camilla and Junior sat in the back where the child answered his friend's questions and recounted his success in the rôle of the only son.

"And I did make Mamabel have a good time," he said. "She only talked error once."

Camilla listened attentively to all. "What error?" she asked.

"She said she wanted to lie down under the lilies and rest where grandpa and grandma are, side of the woods."

Camilla caught her lip with her teeth. She was still working against the bitter disappointment of her failure to influence James Barnes.

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"Dear Mamabel," she breathed.

"But she was sorry afterward," went on Junior; "and we talked about happiness — and — and carrots, and everything like that."

"Carrots?"

"Yes, for the rabbits when they're jumping around on the snow next winter. We're going to take them a Thanksgiving dinner."

Camilla nodded. Her face was grave. She had so hoped to bring comfort and reassurance to the young wife.

Upon arrival at the house, Mabel's eyes questioned her as she had known they would; but all during supper Camilla talked cheerfully of generalities, detailing only what she had done toward closing the house.

"So Elaine will brave the heat and dust a few days longer and stay with her father," said Mabel.

"Yes," replied Camilla; "there are some very good evening concerts in the park, and Mr. Walmsley likes to take her out in his machine."

"Oh, that very nice young Walmsley," said Mabel.

Victor, who had maintained a stony silence so far throughout the meal, suddenly flared into life.

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"Why," he demanded, "do you say that very nice young Walmsley?"

His sister glanced up at him in surprise.

"Why, he's charming," she returned. "So good-looking — like some Oriental prince in disguise."

"He's in disguise all right," growled Victor, attacking a big strawberry as if it might have been the head of a rival.

"Do you know him?" asked Mabel.

"Oh, yes. I'm acquainted with the gilded youth of the town. I played around with them a bit one while."

After supper Victor walked with his sister up and down the terrace under the great elms.

"Is there anything between Elaine and Walmsley?" he asked suddenly.

"I know nothing about it," returned Mabel. "The idea seems to excite you."

"It does. He is n't the right man for her at all."

"It might please her father," said Mabel. "Mrs. Walmsley is such an old and valued friend of his."

"It would not please him," retorted Victor, "if he knew all that I do. It's a pleasant

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position to see a girl you like going about with a worthless chap and having to hold your tongue."

"Oh, it's a censorious world," replied Mabel. "We're not obliged to believe hearsay evidence about people."

"Eh? What? Hearsay? This is n't hearsay," declared Victor hotly. "Drinking, gambling, and all the rest of it."

His sister smiled up at his frowning countenance.

"Oh, it's first hand. You were an eyewitness, then?"

"Decidedly!"

"What were you doing yourself, dear? Trying to hold him back?" she asked.

The gentle irony of her tone made color rush up to her brother's brow.

"I don't—I don't know that I was; but—but—"

"Set a thief to catch a thief," said Mabel, taking her brother's arm affectionately. "If Ben Walmsley's no worse than you are—"

"He is—that is, I've cut it out," declared Victor; "and if Jim kept tab on me, I'd like to know why he should n't know that Ben Walmsley—"

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"Did—did James—" interrupted Mabel, and stopped.

"Yes, he did; he jumped on me and I'm glad of it."

"I'm glad, too!" said Mabel. "What a good man he is."

"Oh, yes, Jim's all right," agreed Victor, too absorbed by the picture of Elaine motoring with Ben under the summer stars to heed the wistful thrill in his sister's tone. "But if he does n't know, I can't even give him a hint, that's the devil of it. I've got to stand by and perhaps see Walmsley entertained out here and swallow it all without a protest. Any objection I made would be set down to jealousy."

Mabel looked up again at the speaker with her slow smile.

"Jealousy must be agony, Victor."

"I fancy so. I'm glad I don't know anything about it."

At the same moment imagination was picturing Elaine's dimple as she laughed with Ben Walmsley, her white veil shielding her golden hair, and his confoundedly handsome black locks rumpled in the wind.

"It might be well if you see things going that way for you to give Jim a hint," he added.

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Mabel's heart glowed at the suggestion of such confidence, and her sad eyes looked before her.

"James is not the man to give Elaine to any one without looking him up. He will need no hints from me. Don't feel so anxious, Victor. Perhaps Ben has followed your example. Perhaps he has cut it out, too."

"No simple life for him," returned Victor, with conviction. "I don't believe it."

His sister regarded him wistfully. "Are you being careful?" she suggested. "Elaine is very, very pretty; but — beyond that, what?"

"Smart as a whip," rejoined Victor promptly.

"Yes, clever enough always to get her own way. What part does that play in the great question?"

"What great question?"

"Love and marriage."

"She's very young," said Victor defensively.

"Oh, my dear boy," and Mabel stood still, looking up, while he, flushed and frowning still, returned her gaze. "I want you to be happy. One of us should be happy. Don't be blind. Don't be content with a girl who simply allows you to love her. Her exactions will be gradual, but always increasing. At first only a garland

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of flowers will hold you and you will rejoice in the fragrant captivity; but little by little the flowers will fade and fall and you will see the inflexible chain on which they were bound."

Mabel bowed her forehead on her brother's breast and he put his arm around her. At once she regained possession of herself and lifted her head, again looking in his eyes. "We know Elaine so well," she added slowly.

"But you told me the only attitude for us to hold toward her was — was gentleness. I think you said — love."

"Yes, but we can love her without wishing to possess her. We can love her, meanwhile being willing that she should spend her life with another."

As Mabel spoke, Camilla appeared on the piazza. Mabel's heart bounded in her throat.

"I have to see Camilla to-night," she said, in a changed voice.

"That's right. Go on," returned Victor; and with a parting pressure of his sister's hand he moved down the hillside and across the brook into the twilight of the woods.

The two women moved to meet one another.

"Junior asleep?" asked Mabel, taking Ca-

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millia's arm and sauntering with her across the soft grass. "He has been teaching me his 'Fear not' verses to-day, and I've been saying them over, to prepare me for this moment: this first moment when you and I should be alone together, Camilla."

The two looked into one another's eyes, and Camilla put her other hand over the one slipped through her arm.

"Tell me all about it," went on Mabel quietly. "I know you and James talked about me. Tell me all. Remember — fear not."

She smiled; but the little color that had been in her face fled. She knew by Camilla's mute pressure that she had nothing to hope.

"I did have a talk with him," replied Camilla, "and he is very fixed in his mistaken ideas; but what are the ideas of a mortal in the light of Omniscience? We have only to go back to the one great Principle and hold our thought there to know that everything will come out right for us. You know how the Bible says, when our father and mother forsake us, — the highest, most unselfish love we know, — then the Lord will take us up. Did you ever read that other statement: 'A broken and a contrite heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise'? Your

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contrite heart, dear Mrs. Barnes, will be sheltered, be sure of it. If you can just be true to God and cease to lean on a mortal, even on your husband, you will receive strength; and at last happiness. I often think over: ‘Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him?’”

“You’re very good to me, Camilla.” Mabel spoke calmly as they walked on. “You’re a real friend. I don’t know what I should have done without you; but I don’t think it will be for long now.”

“What do you mean, dear child? Do you mean you’re beginning to understand — and to hope — and to know?”

“The thing that is right before me all the time is that I am a burden; that I accept a great deal and give nothing. Yes, I read and study, and your philosophy is very beautiful. I believe it’s true, too, and I believe that God is going to take me out of my troubles.”

“Are you outlining?” asked Camilla, trying to speak cheerfully and holding the slender arm closer. “Are you telling Him how He shall release you?”

“He knows what I want, for He knows

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everything, and I believe He is going to answer my prayer. There is n't any other way out. It would do away with all disgrace and all gossip. I'm absolutely unnecessary, and I have lost my health, so I can't take my fate into my own hands and be of use in the world: be an independent woman."

"My dear Mrs. Barnes. You dear young creature. Have n't you learned at least that there is no such thing as death?"

"Yes, I believe in immortality, but I can hope not to be so much in the way on some other plane. Don't tremble, Camilla. I'm not going to do anything desperate. It's only that I see myself weaker every day, and I thank God, and love Him for it, every lonely night."

Camilla pressed her handkerchief to her eyes and kept silence for a minute. It was Mabel now who patted the other's hand and passed an arm around her.

"If this should come to me, Camilla," she went on, without excitement, "and it may come suddenly, I want you to tell James that I never blamed him. He has never had a wrong thought toward me. We can't force love. He is absolutely not to blame. I shall die loving him, and being grateful to him, and sorry for the trouble I've

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brought on him; and so happy in lifting all that trouble away.”

The two women paused in their walk. The stars had come out. The insect voices in meadow and wood were all that broke the stillness.

“Dear Mrs. Barnes,” Camilla looked up at her taller companion, “I’m an ignoramus compared to you, but I know this: that ‘like as a Father pitith his children, so the Lord pitith them that fear Him.’ Look at that wonderful sky. Feel the peace and order and harmony of it; the closeness and love of the Creator. ‘In Him we live, and move, and have our being’; so this perplexed and sorrowful condition which seems to be yours can only be seeming; else how could we ‘rejoice always,’ as the Bible repeatedly reminds us to do?”

“I’m doing my best, Camilla. At least I have come to be as a little child with my hand in my Father’s.”

“Be a happy little child,” returned Camilla fervently. “Trust, and be happy; for we know we ‘cannot drift beyond his love and care’; and we don’t know how soon in Love’s divine way all this condition may be changed and the sunrise of a new day flood your life.”

“So be it, dear Camilla!” said Mabel quietly.

CHAPTER XXVI

SUNRISE

FOR the next two weeks James Barnes remained away from his farm. Then one day he arrived unexpectedly at four o'clock in the afternoon. He had succumbed to the urgent request of Victor, who begged for an interview on the ground to get permission for certain new schemes which would involve the expenditure of considerable money. His first inquiry upon arrival at the house was for Junior. On being told that the child was playing by the brook, he betook himself down the hillside and soon saw his son's broad-brimmed hat making a halo on the back of his head as he lay flat in the grass, his legs kicking in the air while he talked aloud, apparently to himself.

Mr. Barnes's footfall being silent on the soft turf, he drew quite near before the boy perceived him. Then with a whoop of joy Junior scrambled to his feet. "It's a surprise, a surprise," he yelled, and running to his father he leaped to his arms, clutching the latter's body with his strong little legs.

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"Go slow, you Indian," laughed the captured man, standing still and kissing the sunburned face.

At this moment the newcomer discovered that his son was not alone. On the rustic seat, concealed from the house by the hazel bushes, sat his wife with her sewing. He followed the lines of her white gown until he reached the face, scarcely less white. She did not rise to greet him because it was a physical impossibility in the tremor that ran through her at sight of him, all unexpected. In that encounter of their eyes James Barnes realized suddenly that his wife looked very ill and his heart gave a throb of pity for her.

"Oh, you're there, Mabel," he said, as Junior came to earth and freed him. "I thought the boy must have become a poet and was apostrophizing the sky all by himself."

Mr. Barnes approached the rustic seat and kissed his wife's smooth forehead.

"We were n't looking for you," she said, and her mouth was dry.

The husband sat down beside her, and Junior stood before them.

"I did n't expect to come for another week yet, but Victor is certainly an enthusiast, and

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he wants to hold me up once more; then he says he'll let me off for the rest of the summer."

"I'm glad he's a help to you," said Mabel with effort, after a pause. She looked fragile as a snow-wreath beside the robust, carefully dressed man at her side.

"Well, little chap," said James Barnes with a shake of his son's shoulders, "how goes it? How's Camilla and Popinjay and Angus and Pete and the rest of your suite?"

"They're all right," returned Junior, rather absently; "but, Daddy, I was just trying to decide something when you came up; tell me which should *you* think I'd rather have—a little sister or a little brother?"

"What's this?" inquired James Barnes with a short laugh, the permanent line between his brows deepening. "I should think you had enough pets without wanting to adopt a playfellow."

"Oh, this is n't going to be a playfellow. It's going to be a baby." Suddenly a tiny garment fell to the grass from the white folds of the gown brushing James Barnes's gray trousers. Junior picked it up and exhibited it, holding it by the tiny sleeves. "I thought Mamabel was

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making clothes for Miss Rosalind, so I told her she had plenty, and Camilla could make 'em — ”

The color had flooded Mabel Barnes's face when the child began his revelation, and now it left her features in a stiff pallor. Her husband's expression was stony and his eyes never swerved from Junior's face as the child delivered his thunderbolt.

The frozen amazement of his countenance seemed to Mabel to deal her her deathblow. An awful despair gripped her heart, and then, suddenly, green grass, summer sky, and waving foliage all grew black, and blessed unconsciousness of all things enveloped her senses.

“Daddy, Daddy!” cried Junior, as his reflective glance wandered to Mamabel and he saw her eyes close and her head fall back.

James Barnes turned quickly and caught his wife in his arms, drawing the dark head to his breast.

“She must n’t, Daddy,” — a big sob caught in the child’s throat, and he began to cry. “Make her wake up. Make her! She wants to go under the lilies. She must n’t.”

James Barnes’s ruddy color had fled.

“Hush, Junior,” he said. “You must be a

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man now, not a baby. Take your hat and bring it here full of water."

The severe tone steadied the terrified child. Mamabel was breathing heavily. He ran trembling to the brook, his lips repeating the declarations Camilla had taught him, and was quickly back with the water.

James Barnes bathed the white forehead and temples.

"You may rub her hands, Junior," he said, and the child rubbed the hands, swallowing big lumps that rose in his throat.

"God's here, anyway, Daddy," he said tremulously. "God'll take care of Mamabel. Shall I — shall I get Camilla?"

James Barnes's heart was beating in great bounds. It was such a frail woman he held in his arms. His immovable plans receiving this battering shock to their stability made a tumult in his soul like the meeting of an ingoing and outgoing tide. The little garment, a white flake on the grass, caused him an agony of tenderness.

"No, don't call Camilla," he said. "Bring more water."

Junior manfully obeyed, his tears dropping and his lips repeating his "Fear not" verses.

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God was loving them all the time and He would help Daddy to wake Mamabel up.

Again he held the hat full of water while his father bathed her temples. "Now, rub her hands again, Junior."

The child obeyed, and presently Mabel's eyelids quivered and then opened. Her dark eyes gazed straight up into the gray ones looking down. The resolute veil which had for months interposed between her and those eyes was gone.

"My darling," said James Barnes softly, "am I holding you comfortably?"

She did not speak, nor did a muscle of her face change. She just looked, and looked, not knowing whether she were awake.

Her secret, her sad secret, she had kept from all, even Camilla. It meant to her only a further binding of a reluctant husband, and she could not bring herself to voice it. This afternoon, however, when for the first time Junior had seen part of the contents of the workbag which was her constant companion, and commented on the clothes she was making for Camilla's doll, some impulse made her confide in the little boy. Perhaps she knew the light that springs in a child's eyes at the prospect of another child: his kin.

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Perhaps she longed for one ray of brightness to fall upon the path of the poor little unwelcome stranger. Whatever the cause, she yielded to the impulse. She felt so ill, so weak to-day, and she leaned on the love of this child, James Barnes's son.

Junior had been much excited over the news, and had weighed carefully the pros and cons of a brother who would like horses as well as he did, and a sister who would have to do everything he said, and of whom he should take care. His father had interrupted the argument, and terrifying things had come to pass.

He gazed now at his stepmother with wide, wet eyes.

"What did you go to sleep for, Mamabel?" he asked accusingly, still swallowing sobs. "My hat's spoiled."

"You've been a good boy," said his father quietly. "You may run away now and find Camilla and get her all alone somewhere and shut the door and tell her the precious secret; and get her to help you decide whether you want a brother or a sister. Don't let any one else hear you, though."

Junior paused a moment, but the prospect thus held out was enticing; so he took his

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bedraggled hat, a recent insistence of Camilla's on account of extreme sunburn, and started to run up the hill.

"What a good man James is," thought Mabel apathetically. She was not yet prepared to be certain that events were actual.

"My darling, are you comfortable?" asked James Barnes again.

An intense tenderness shone down into the dark eyes that never left his face.

She felt his strong arms around her like the fulfilling of weary longing; but it did not occur to her to answer him. It did not occur to her that this new James Barnes could hear her alien voice — if she had a voice. She was not sure that she had.

"I thought I knew how much I loved you, dear," he said, "but I did not know till now."

He saw her eyelids quiver, and he drew her closer, speaking slowly.

"Darling, tell me; can you forgive all my mistakes? Do you like to be in my arms?"

Supposing he should withdraw them! She found her voice.

"Yes," came from her pale, unsmiling lips.

"And in our child we shall come closer. You shall find me more worthy than you have

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before. I love you with my whole being, my darling."

He was pouring wine and oil into her wounds, and she began to revive, and to know wonderfully that this was real, and to return from a far country.

She lifted her hand and put it over his lips. The little frail hand. He kissed it passionately; then lifted her head higher and rested his cheek against that dark coronet of hair.

"I — I hope I can stay, James," she murmured slowly. "I've prayed so to go. Do you think God will let me take it back?"

A chill penetrated to the man's heart. Camilla had been right. He had been stupidly, doggedly wrong.

"I'm going to see to it that you stay, my beloved," he answered with conviction. "You would n't go just when you have crowned my life. My wife loves me. That's all I need, to be the happiest man on earth. Stay? Why, I'm going to breathe for you as nearly as I can until you are strong again. Now, sweetheart, I'm going to carry you up to the house."

For the first time a smile touched his wife's lips. "I feel so much better, James. I'm sure I can walk. I'm perfectly able to walk."

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James Barnes picked up the bit of fine flannel from the grass. There was not a sound but the brook's gurgle for a minute, while his strong hand pressed the little garment to his eyes. Then he tucked it into the workbag, while Mabel slowly sat up.

"Don't move, dear. I'm going to carry you."

"But it will frighten Camilla."

"You shall walk in a few days," rejoined James Barnes; and he lifted his wife carefully. She put her arm around his neck and he carried her easily, too easily, up the hill.

She had had breakfast in bed that morning, but appeared at dinner, and Camilla had escorted her with cushions down to the seat among the hazel bushes. Her decline had been gradual to those with her in the house, but that morning Lucretia had told Camilla her fears, and rare tears had blurred her vision as she spoke:—

"Is everybody blind but me?" she demanded crossly. "I'd like to know why Mr. Ford don't insist on having a doctor see his sister. She's just slippin' away, Camilla. What's the matter with everybody that they can't see it?"

Camilla's steady eyes looked far off. "I've been thinking of this, too," she answered, "and asking God to show me what to do."

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Lucretia snorted with exasperation. "Heaven helps those that help themselves," she declared. "It don't need the Creator to show me that you'd ought to have Dr. Whittaker up here this very day."

Dr. Whittaker had vaccinated Camilla when she was a schoolgirl. He still believed in calomel and still took snuff. The picture of the old gentleman ministering to Mabel's mortal sorrow made Camilla smile at Lucretia to the latter's added exasperation.

"Well, if you think you know it all, get somebody else, then; but for the land's sake, do something," snapped Lucretia.

"I'm going to," returned Camilla, sober enough now. "I'm going to write Mr. Barnes to-day. I'll tell him what you've just said."

"Between you and me and the lamp-post, I believe he's at the bottom of it," said Lucretia in a lowered and savage tone. "She don't cough, nor seem to have any straight-forward disease that a body can tackle. I've always noticed something queer, now, have n't you, Camilla?"

"That is n't our business, Lucretia."

"Get out! I'd make it my business if I was as close to 'em as you are. It does seem sometimes as if men was the off-scourin's o' the earth.

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Great, big, selfish, strappin' things. What did Barnes want to harness that girl up to him for if he did n't care for her? It don't seem possible, but lots o' times I've thought he neglected her; yes, sir, I've thought she felt neglected!"

"Lucretia, you don't understand," returned Camilla earnestly; "truly, you don't understand!"

"I s'pose you do, then," sneered Lucretia, "and just stand by smilin', and lettin' her slide down and down till finally she's out. Go ahead and write to Jim Barnes. Let's get him here and I'll see how much you talk to him; and if you don't come out strong, I tell you I'll take a hand,—or mebbe it'll be a foot. It'd give me some satisfaction to kick him all around this farm, and I cal'late to do it if he don't wake up and tend to his business."

Camilla smiled sadly. "I'll write to him, Lucretia. I think myself he ought to come."

She was just sealing the envelope on this carefully constructed letter that afternoon when Junior broke in upon her. In his hand he carried a drenched hat. He slammed the nursery door and Camilla looked up from her desk.

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"What happened to your hat?" she asked.

The child's eyes were still big with excitement and his cheeks were spotted with tears.

Camilla suddenly realized this and pushed her chair back and held out her hand.

"What is it, dear? Did you fall in the water?"

"Where's Lucretia and Bessie and Pete and Uncle Victor and Sister?" demanded Junior.

"Downstairs or out doors. What do you mean?"

"Are we all alone? — 'cause Daddy says nobody else must hear."

Camilla drew him to her, and he had never seen her look so interested about anything. It was quite worth while having a secret to tell somebody who looked like this.

"Daddy! What do you mean! Is your father here, Junior?"

"Of course, he is.

"Where is he?"

"Down by the brook with Mamabel."

Camilla's heart beat faster. She could see that her little boy was quivering and striving for self-control.

"We did n't expect him, did we?" she said quietly. The wet hat had fallen to the floor and both Junior's hands were in Camilla's familiar

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clasp. "Did Mamabel expect him, do you think?"

The boy compressed his lips and shook his head. "No; 'cause when I told him about the baby she got awful white — and — and did error—" he swallowed — "and went to sleep, and I had to get water in my hat — and — rub her hands — and —"

It was no use; the love and excitement in Camilla's usually tranquil eyes, the sympathy, the absorption, were too much. The little boy threw his arms around her, buried his face in her neck, and struggled with sobs.

"Yes, darling, it's all right," said Camilla soothingly, utterly unable to see through the mist that veiled her own sight. She patted the child, his wet cheek pressed to hers.

"And Mamabel is all right now?" she asked at last, with a reassuring note of cheerfulness that stuck in her throat.

"Yes — 'cause I — waked her up and — and she — she spoiled my hat," sobbed Junior with characteristic masculine resentment at having been dragged through a disturbing scene.

"There are lots of hats," soothed Camilla. "Wasn't it good that you could help Mamabel? Did — did Daddy help her, too?"

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Camilla felt the quiet question to be crucial.

"Of course." The child began to gain control of himself. "Daddy held her in his arms and rubbed her face, but I"—a deep sob—"I had to keep running to the brook."

"That's right, darling. I'm so glad you were there to help. You said—what did you say a minute ago about a baby?"

Junior strove with himself. He, the big brother of an impending helpless creature, should not be weeping in Camilla's neck when he announced his secret. Mamabel had said that it was a secret when she told him. Daddy had warned him that it was a secret that Camilla only was to hear.

He straightened up and assumed as well as he could what he considered a suitable air.

"You're not to tell anybody," he warned, swallowing a tardy sob.

"No, no," promised Camilla, pressing her hands together, and looking at him with just such an expression as one could wish for the reception of one's news.

"We're going to have a baby," announced Junior, with superior calm. "I have n't decided," he added, "whether it's going to be a boy or a girl."

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Camilla caught at his hands.

"When did Mamabel tell you this?"

"To-day, just before Daddy came."

"And you told him?"

Junior pulled his hands away. He was not in a hand-squeezing mood.

"Yep. I wanted him to help me decide about brothers and sisters."

"Did it surprise him?"

"Yep."

"Was he glad? Junior, dear, was he glad?"

"How do I know when Mamabel did error right away?"

"Junior, precious, tell me one thing." Camilla leaned toward the child with shining eyes, and spoke pleadingly. "Try to think just what happened. Do you think Daddy felt — felt displeased with Mamabel for — for planning a little brother for you?"

"I have n't decided on a brother," Junior reminded her severely.

"Well, a sister; either one," urged Camilla. "Did Daddy seem — well, happy?"

"I guess he was n't very happy with Mamabel acting that way; but he kept calling her 'darling,' and hugging her; so he was n't cross, I guess."

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Camilla amazed her companion by flinging herself suddenly around to the desk and burying her face in the curve of her arm. She held herself motionless while Junior regarded her. What was the matter with grown-up ladies that made them act so strangely!

He frowned and took a step nearer.

"Now, you're doing error, Camilla," he declared. Her shoulders shook a little. "What's the matter?" he demanded. "Are you afraid you'll have to take care of it? I'm going to take all the care of it. I'm going down to the station with Pete to meet the train, and I'm going to carry it in my arms, and nobody's going to touch it but me."

At this Camilla lifted her head and regarded him. His words must have been very reassuring, for in her happiest moods he had never seen her look so radiant. Junior sighed with relief.

She took a freshly addressed letter from her desk and tore it in small pieces.

"Let's go downstairs," she said with her most charming, mysterious air of happiness; "let's go down and see if they're coming."

"That is n't any use," returned Junior loftily. "My little baby won't get here till the leaves turn red."

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"But let's go, anyway. I want to get out on the grass and dance!"

Camilla was nice and silly again. Junior liked her that way best; and he laughed, and clattered downstairs after her with a will.

CHAPTER XXVII

THE ANGEL'S NAME

WHAT Camilla saw when she reached the porch made her heart stand still a moment, and Junior caught her dress and forgot his big brotherhood sufficiently to shrink behind her.

Daddy was coming up the hill with Mama-bell in his arms. Had she gone to sleep again!

But as Mr. Barnes came nearer they saw him smile at his burden, and Camilla ran down the steps, followed more slowly by the little boy.

"You surprised us," she said, rather breathlessly, beaming at the master of the house.

"Yes; Victor played the rôle of my good angel this time, and brought me. I think you might have told me, Camilla, that my wife was not so well."

Camilla regarded him, demurely, under the rebuke. He was a man and, therefore, must put the blame somewhere. He mounted the steps and was tenderly depositing Mabel in a wicker reclining-chair, just as Lucretia appeared around the corner of the house with a glass on a tray. Her eyes flashed at sight of him.

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"What is it, eh?" she asked in a frightened voice, her eyes on Mrs. Barnes as she hurried up the steps at a pace which imperiled the egg-nog.

James Barnes encountered her belligerent look and it gave him a sense of well-deserved condemnation.

Mabel, her head resting back on the chintz cushion, smiled at her.

"Nothing, Lucretia, except that my husband is joining you in making a baby of me," she replied.

"H'm!" ejaculated Lucretia, and again James Barnes received meekly her fiery glance, which spoke plainer than the words would have done which she halted on the end of her tongue. "Drink this," she said curtly, offering her little tray.

"Lucretia is the kindest creature, James. She follows me around all day with these delicious things; but I don't believe I can drink it just now, Lucretia," finished Mabel apologetically.

"Yes, you can, dear," said her husband, pulling up a small chair beside her and speaking with a tone and expression which caused Lucretia's severe mien to change while she watched him.

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"I'll drink it for you, Mamabel," offered Junior, hastening up to her.

"Run away, scamp," said his father, absently pushing the child aside, and taking the glass under Lucretia's round gaze.

He held it to his wife's lips.

"Have n't you any straws?" he demanded impatiently of Lucretia.

She resented his frown. "We don't feed 'em to sick folks up this way," she retorted. "He does well to frown at *me!*" she thought wrathfully.

"To drink through," he explained. "Have you a glass tube?"

"No. The Metcalfs had one, but they took it with 'em."

Camilla stood motionless, with beaming eyes, watching James Barnes supporting Mabel's cushions with deft hand, and lifting her so she could drink. "Don't hurry," he said tenderly. "Drink slowly."

Lucretia looked on. "He's good and scared," she thought. "Serves him right. If I did n't think so much of her I'd like to have her die to spite him."

Camilla smiled, watching Lucretia's face.

While the group was thus situated, Elaine

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and Victor approached from the orchard. He was bareheaded and she swinging her hat by a ribbon.

"Why, it's Daddy," exclaimed the girl. "He did come, then."

Victor ran up the steps, noting the devotional attitude of his brother-in-law with surprise. "Mighty glad you could make it, Jim," he said, while his questioning eyes regarded his sister.

"Dear old Daddy," cried Elaine, tripping near and placing a butterfly kiss on his temple. He did not look at the newcomers.

"Howdy," he said, absently, his attention concentrated on the half-empty glass.

"That's all, please, James," said Mabel, looking up at him pleadingly.

"Very well, dear," was the reply; but the tone of it caused Victor to forget his farming schemes, and Elaine to purse her lips and look around at him slowly.

James Barnes handed the glass to Lucretia, eased his wife's head back on the chintz pillow, and settling again in the chair close beside and facing her, he took her hand in his, and kept his eyes on her face as he talked.

"I want you to go to town for me in the morning, Victor."

The Angel's Name

"Right O," returned that pleased and relieved young man.

"I want you to bring men out with you to screen this porch."

"I don't suppose I'll be able to get them at once," remarked Victor; "it's the busy time."

"You must get them at once. Mabel will sleep out here."

"Then, Daddy," said Elaine, "if Mamabel is n't going to use her room, Ben can come."

"No, Ben can't come just now. Wait till August."

"It will be too hot for anybody to stay here in August," objected Elaine.

"Then Elm Farm will have to remain an arid, Benless wilderness," remarked James Barnes dryly.

Victor gave Elaine a malicious look, and she made a grimace at him. She had been finding much entertainment in holding Ben Walmsley over the amateur farmer's head for the past two weeks, soon making the discovery that her old friend was an unwelcome subject of conversation.

Elaine stared at her father's back. He had not looked at her once. The delicate symmetry of

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her stepmother's face against the rose chintz apparently absorbed him.

"What has happened, I wonder?" she thought.

"I hate to be away all day to-morrow, Jim," said Victor. "It's so hard to corral you, and you're liable to slip off before I've said my say. I want to show you by daylight."

"You shall show me by daylight."

"Are things quieter in the city?"

"No, buzzing. I expected to go back early to-morrow morning."

"Well, Elaine's as good a driver as I am; better for this purpose. She'll smile on the screen men and they'll follow her willy-nilly. Send her instead of me."

"No, I want you to go. I shall have a long list of things for you to attend to."

"And then you leave the next morning," said Victor aggrieved.

"No. I'm not going back."

"What?"

"I'm not going back."

"Not at all?"

"Well, I may spend a portion of my old age in the city."

Victor and Elaine exchanged another look.

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Mabel and her husband drank deep of one another's eyes, and the frail hand returned a tender pressure.

"That'll mean money to you, Jim, I suppose," said Victor after a pause, regarding the light in his sister's face.

"No; it means money to the other fellow," was the laconic reply.

"Well, look out. You must n't feel too poor to listen to me, you know."

James Barnes's slight smile and reply warmed his wife's heart still further.

"There is n't any combination of people or circumstances," he said slowly, "that could make me feel poor."

"That's the talk," answered Victor; but he turned and walked away down the hill, for his heart was swelling at sight of his sister's face.

Lucretia still stood, holding her tray as if rooted to the floor. She watched the master and mistress of the house, fascinated.

James Barnes suddenly looked up at her. "Lucretia, what do you think of a farm considered coldly and solely as an investment?"

Her reply came promptly: "I think it's exactly like a sponge," she answered; "only it

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drinks up money instead o' water and it don't never get enough."

James Barnes laughed. He suddenly pressed his lips to his wife's hair; then he kissed both her hands, first one and then the other.

"Law!" thought Lucretia, startled and redening, and she fled from the unwonted sight of such frank endearment. She passed Camilla on the way.

"I *never!*" she said, *sotto voce*. "What does it all mean?"

"Love!" responded happy Camilla, beaming.

"I should say so! But folks can be kind o' decent, can't they?" And Lucretia disappeared, casting one last shining look over her shoulder toward the piazza.

The south breeze ruffled the dark hair on Mabel's brow. It seemed as if each zephyr was bringing her new strength; a great and vitalizing gratitude. Her husband seemed not to wish to stir from holding her, and watching her. They were alone on the piazza now.

"Mabel," he said, and he no longer smiled. His gray eyes besought the brown ones. "I've never heard you say you loved me."

"Dearest," she answered, "no one but the trees and the sky and the brook has heard me

The Angel's Name

say it, but I've told them a thousand times that I love you. I love you. I love you."

Gray eyes brimmed, and James Barnes pressed grave lips to hers.

Presently she spoke again. "Call Elaine for me, will you, dear?"

The girl was romping with Angus on the terrace, while Camilla sat near. Junior had climbed into Camilla's lap and was tickling her ear with loud whispers as to his intention to teach the small brother or sister his song.

At her father's call, Elaine came up the steps, arranging her pretty, disordered hair. She approached the absorbed pair.

"Elaine," said her stepmother, and a great light shone in her eyes, "I want to tell you that we won't go back to the old house. You may look for the prettiest apartment you can find."

"Good news," returned Elaine with her best manner. "What does this mean?"

"It means happiness, dear, happiness." Mabel stretched out a hand to the girl, who accepted it, touched in spite of herself by the joy in the spirituel face.

Her father took her other hand.

"It means," he added, meeting her eyes,

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“that we have begun our honeymoon, Elaine,
your Mamabel and I.”

The girl regarded him in silence; then the veneer, polished to a charming surface by those excellent ladies in New York, cracked and broke away in the presence of a holy reality. The best side of the real girl came to the surface.

“I’m glad. I love you both!” she exclaimed softly and quickly. She kissed first Mabel, then her father, clinging with both arms around his neck.

Junior’s high voice came from under the elm tree, singing strong and free:—

“For the angel’s name was Love,
The angel’s name was Love!”

THE END

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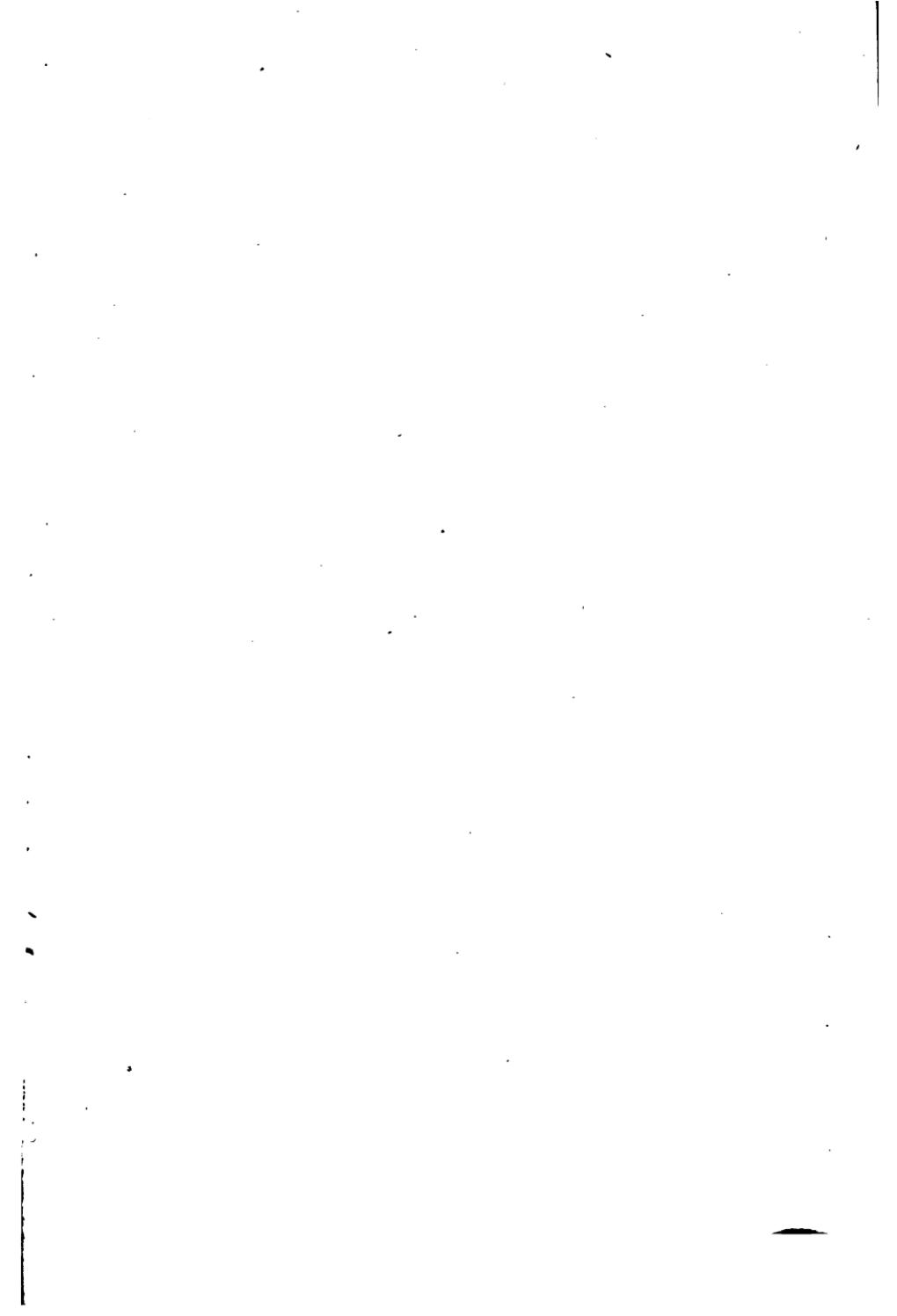
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